

Southern Ontario Principals' Perspectives on Recess in Low-Income Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

Elementary school recess is now generally understood to be a necessary part of a child's school day. Therefore, it is important to move beyond research regarding the *need* for recess and capture the *logistics* and *experiences* of those directly involved. The present study utilizes a descriptive, exploratory approach to understand *principals'* experiences of recess in low-income neighbourhoods. Participants included 12 principals from an elementary school board in Southern Ontario. Opened-ended questions regarding principals' general recess experiences and their recess definitions were asked, along with self-report measures of recess activities, student engagement, supervision ratios, recess rules and restrictions, as well as suggestions for future improvements. The results revealed considerable inconsistencies across schools. This is important information as it is indicative of the need policy and guidelines in order to maximize a safe and positive recess environment for children.

Keywords: recess, principal, education, policy

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Chapter One: Introduction

There is little information and research available on principals' experiences and strategies used in relation to the implementation and execution of recess in schools. Are principals responsible for making recess decisions? What policy/guidelines, if any, do they refer to? These questions are important because in many school districts in the United States, recess time has been reduced or eliminated altogether (American Association for the Child's Right to Play, 2004). This decline of outdoor play opportunities may be a result of changes made to school schedules as an increasing importance is placed on instructional time (Burriss & Burriss, 2011; Turner, Chriqui & Chaloupka, 2013). Another reason for the decline may be due to direct concerns related to child safety during recess. In some school districts resources and funding are limited therefore there is difficulty maintaining appropriate adult to child supervision ratios (Burriss & Burriss, 2011; Turner et al., 2013). With concerns over child safety and the increasing pressure placed on academics, there are limited opportunities for physically active play to occur during the school day.

To date, there have been limited studies conducted regarding principals' experiences of recess. In the United States, Simon and Childers (2006) found that principals reported that their decisions regarding recess were influenced by their own experiences – rather than research or superintendent recommendations. Therefore, there is a possibility that elementary school recess decisions are left to the principals' discretion rather than policies and best practice guidelines. Specifically, for this thesis, the recess experiences of Canadian (specifically Ontario), school principals were studied. Recently, child and youth advocates in Canada have vowed to bring

back play in order to meet daily physical activity requirements (Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines, 2015; ParticipACTION, 2013). This approach allows recess to be a possible opportunity to meet these needs, but educators and researchers are lacking documentation of recess in Ontario schools. For example, is recess regulated across school boards? Or does it vary based on the individual school? Generally, the Canadian Ministry of Education aligns themselves with the World Health Organization's Global Health Initiative called the Comprehensive School Health Plan (1995). This is an internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes, extending beyond curricular instruction to reconsider and modify social and physical landscapes that support better health trajectories (WHO, 1997). Within this holistic framework, a school's foundation is made up of their social and physical environment, teaching and learning, healthy school policy and partnerships and services. These four pillars must be harmonized to help students reach their full potential as learners, thus the recess portion of a child's school day must be included (WHO, 1997; JCSH, 2008). Please note that the term "recess" is not international and may be used interchangeably with the word "fitness break" for this study.

Rationale

In comparison to student perspectives, principal experiences of elementary school recess have been overlooked. Recess is now generally understood to be a necessary part of a child's school day, thus it is also important to move beyond research regarding the *need* for recess and the potential developmental benefits and further capture *logistics* and *experiences*. Current research indicates that crowded,

unorganized, and minimally supervised conditions can compromise children's ability to engage in positive social interactions and meaningful, active play (McNamara, 2013; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003). In addition, Thomson (2007) states that children's experience on the playground could affect and remain with them longer than their educational experience in the classroom.

Furthermore, research indicates that children are also influenced by the neighbourhoods they reside in. Consequently, neighbourhoods are a particularly important determinant for childhood well-being due to influences it may impose on their activity patterns (Sellstrom & Bremberg, 2006). This is especially true for low income neighbourhoods because the risk factors associated with children's developmental trajectory outcomes are higher as they are a more vulnerable population. For example, research indicates that disadvantaged neighbourhoods may have increased risks of low birth weight in children, behavioural problems, injuries, school dropout, childhood obesity and maltreatment (Hemphill et al., 2010; Sellstrom & Bremberg, 2006; Oliver & Hayes, 2005; Keating & Hertzman, 1999). Since research shows that the risk of negative outcomes is higher in socially disadvantaged families, this thesis will focus on underprivileged neighbourhoods in order to further understand their experiences and help mitigate risk factors to children in these areas. In addition, intentions would first be applied to this at risk population.

Thus, this study was designed to capture descriptive information about the logistics and experiences of recess in low income neighbourhoods from principals' perspectives. In regards to the organization of the thesis, the second chapter of this study highlight current policies, guidelines and the structure of education in Ontario

in order to set a basis of understanding for the current educational system in this location. The need for recess in schools, debates over supervision, safety and organization as well as the importance of the principal's role are reviewed. In addition, the third chapter highlights the methods of the study. Principals responded to an online questionnaire designed to solicit their experiences with recess activities and student engagement, supervision ratios as well as rules and restrictions during the fitness break portion of recess. Participants also provided suggestions to what they believe will help improve the fitness break portion of recess. The fourth chapter reveals results of the study, utilizing a descriptive exploratory study approach to capture thematic results of the questionnaire. Additionally, the discussion chapter provides a review of the similarities and differences of principal's experiences of recess – as well as implications and suggestions. Overall, data collected will provide valuable information to inform future policy, practices and guidelines of recess to provide optimal play experiences for children and youth.

Research Questions

Thus, the goal of this research is to answer two main questions:

1. What are principals' experiences with the following during the fitness break portion of recess in low income neighbourhoods:
 - a. Recess activities and student engagement
 - b. Supervision ratios
 - c. Recess rules and restrictions
2. What do principals believe would help improve the fitness break portion of recess in low income neighbourhoods?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to gain a deeper understanding of principals' *experiences* of recess in Ontario, the *need* for recess in schools will first be reviewed. The literature is divided into five main sections: The first provides a general overview of the research on recess including the current definition of recess and the need for play in schools. The second highlights how play influences cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, as well as highlight the need for a positive recess environment for children to thrive in school. Third, research on supervision, safety and organization standards of recess as well as the current educational policy and guidelines for public elementary schools in Ontario, strengthens the understanding of the complexity of this landscape. Finally, the literature ends with a review on the principal's role and policy implications for recess time in order to promote future developments in this area of research.

What is Recess?

Defining Recess. There is difficulty constructing a cross-culture definition of recess due to the complexity and multifaceted structures of its social and physical interactions. Holmes, Pellegrini and Schmidt (2006) framed recess in a global context as an "important time of the school day when children have the opportunity to engage in physical activity, conversations and activities with their peers relatively free from adult intervention" (p. 735-736). In addition, recess has also been defined as a break period within the school day (often outside) with varying degrees of occurrences, durations, and levels of supervision (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). Recess is thought to contribute to children's creative, social and emotional development (Pellegrini &

Smith, 1993). Further, recess has also been considered as a complement to physical education classes in order to increase levels of physical activity in children (Ramstetter, Murray & Garner, 2010). A further discussion on the importance of equal opportunities for play for children and recess not being withheld as a method of behaviour management will be explored in more detail later.

The Need for Recess: Play in Schools. In the last two decades, *play* for children and youth has changed remarkably. The 1989 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, “The child shall have full opportunity to play and have recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right” (as cited in Ramstetter et al., 2010, p. 519). Yet, opportunities for play are dwindling and the importance of active social play for children and youth is now more evident than ever (Simon & Childers, 2006). Relative to these rights, there are potential developmental benefits in academic, cognitive, emotional, physical, and social spectrums through play activities (Ramstetter et al., 2010). Thus, children and youth must be provided with optimal opportunities for meaningful active play not only because this is a child’s right, but because of the positive influences play has on their social interactions and developmental trajectories.

In 2005, the Ontario government Ministry of Education created a Daily Physical Activity (DPA) policy to be implemented in Ontario classrooms as part of a Healthy Schools Plan. This Healthy Schools Plan Policy No. 138 lists that, “School boards must ensure that all elementary students, including students with special

needs, have a minimum of twenty minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day during instructional time.” This policy was created to address the issue of physical inactivity and to improve children’s overall health and wellness so they can enhance their learning opportunities (DPA, 2005). In addition to instructional policy, physical education classes and recess can provide opportunities for children and youth to move away from the constraints and routines of the classroom. Although recommendations for recess activity are not specifically mentioned in the Ministry documents, recess can be leveraged as a potential arena for physical activity and should complement not replace physical education classes (Haug, Torsheim & Samdal, 2009). Thus the fitness break portion of the school day may also provide an opportunity to increase physical activity, especially if students are not involved in extracurricular activities outside of the school or are not scheduled to have physical education class for the day.

In addition, suitable, active play may create opportunities for children to think for themselves, develop their own knowledge, control their own pedagogy, and be part of a creative process even with variations of rules and regulations (Thomson, 2007). As Pellegrini (2009) stated, play is also *functional*, meaning that it has beneficial outcomes to periods of development. For example, locomotor play has been associated with increased bone density, social play with social dominance as well as symbolic play with early literacy (Pellegrini, 2009). Overall, a focus of caregivers and educators should be to encourage children to play due to the potential gains in development that can assist in the maintenance of good health and well-being.

How Play Influences Child Development in a Recess Environment

Cognitive Development. Research on play for children and youth has been indicated to have cognitive benefits. From an academic perspective, results have also shown that recess can maximize student learning in the classroom as it provides a break from cognitively demanding academic tasks (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). In relation, the theory of *massed versus distributed practice* indicates that a subject is learned more effectively when separated by short intervals and attention to tasks are maximized when efforts are distributed over time (Holmes et al., 2006). Therefore, recess may provide this possible break between tasks, which could ultimately lead to better performance in the classroom. This can be supported by Henley et al. (2007) who discussed that exercise during recess can also foster attention skills in children which can increase active participation during academic instruction following recess. When exercise is administered over longer periods of time is more likely to enhance cognitive abilities instead of small, temporary changes (Taras, 2005). Holmes et al. (2006) study of preschool children also found that outdoor recess rejuvenates a child, which again helps them attend to classroom tasks. This renewed energy and attentiveness is important to maintain for a child's overall health and well-being. These studies support the academic benefits of maximized student learning in the classroom when recess was mandated for children and youth.

To contrast, unstructured play during the school day can also influence cognitive development. From this perspective, children need to socialize, choose their own level of physical activity and develop games without feeling pressure and constraints from adults (Dills, Morgan & Rotthoff, 2011). When an adult leads a play

activity, students may lose their freedom to engage in activities of their own choice and be creative thus putting further constraints on the development of their cognition (Ramstetter et al., 2010). Hence, play during unstructured recess time may help students recover from the highly structured routines of the school day. This recovery is necessary for children to perform high-level cognitive tasks with renewed attention and a higher level of proficiency upon returning to academic lessons (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). In addition, Burriss and Burriss (2011) also found that during play children are able to negotiate, communicate and compromise therefore assisting in their interpretation of signals and cues offered by others. Therefore, play during recess can provide children with stimulating intellectual activity both inside and outside of the classroom.

Social Development. A child's social development and learning can be influenced by play activity. Through a playful socialization process "a child learns basic rules such as sharing, helping, respecting others rights and taking responsibility" (Unal, 2009, p. 95). In play, children are able to rehearse and develop social strategies with their peers, take others' perspectives and make decisions (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). Play may also provide opportunities for role modeling pro-social behaviours, as well as developing social competence in relationship building with others (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). Unstructured play also allows students to approximate, test and review their social approach which is important for social development in children.

Consequently, there is debate surrounding outdoor play environments (such as recess) and whether they positively or negatively affect a child's social development. Anderson-Butcher, Newsome and Nay (2003) stated that a "lack of recess supervision

can make recess one of the most feared times for children” (p. 135). Research also shows that in the recess context, there are opportunities for bullying behaviours and victimization to occur as supervision ratios can be large and allow more opportunities for aggressive acts (McNamara, 2014). Bullying from this perspective can be defined as “an aggressive goal - directed behaviour that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance” (Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014, p. 327). In traditional bullying, this harm may take on the form of social exclusion. Wang, Iannotti, & Luk (2012) characterize social exclusion as leaving others out of things on purpose, excluding others from their group of friends, and completely ignoring others. In addition, the socialization aspect of bullying is often combined with verbal bullying which has been described as spreading false rumours or telling lies about others (Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012). These negative behaviours are a reason why a recess supervisor may be viewed as a preventative measure for children and are used to create safe nurturing school environments for positive social interactions to thrive (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome & Nay, 2003). Furthermore, Frazen and Kamps (2008) found that active supervision is an essential characteristic for maintaining a safe play environment as it can assist in reducing the number of annual injuries that occur during recess. Overall, beneficial social development is made applicable for children through effective supervision at recess.

In relation to methodological construction, previous studies often target the implementation and importance of various recess intervention programs. In reviewing the literature, there are few studies that have focused specifically on social skill interventions and their mediating effects on the organization of recess. Note that the

majority of recess studies have been conducted in the United States and therefore will be used as a base for understanding for Canada. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2003) completed a study where university students from Utah were trained as recess supervisors in enhancing social skills during play. Systematic data collection and checklists for problem behaviours resulted in the finding that structured social skills intervention increased recess organization and reduced aggressive and problematic behaviours on the playground (Anderson-Butcher, et al., 2003). In this particular study they defined problem behaviours as hitting, pushing, kicking, throwing, tackling and verbal abuse (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003). It is important to reduce these behaviours in order to make recess a more positive social environment for children to experience on a daily basis. In addition, Cuccaro and Geitner (2007) created a direct social skills intervention called Alternative to Lunch Program for Students (ALPS). Using action research, they targeted a specific group of children who commonly experienced problem behaviours at recess and gave them direct social skill instruction in small groups with feedback (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2007). This study found that there was a decrease in the number of behaviour referrals to the office and therefore a reduction in some problem behaviours on the playground, resulting in more positive play interactions (Cuccaro & Geitner, 2007). Since this study was conducted over a short time period there is a need for this program to be extended to strengthen validity and determine if there are significant reductions in problem behaviours in alternative social intervention programs.

Emotional Development. Emotional development may also be a result of play activities. Although this area has not been researched as much as the other

domains of development, research indicates that children's emotions can be impacted by play activities especially with peers. A child's ability to maintain relationships and form instances of support and guidance is an important value (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). In relation, Kostelnik et al. discusses how quality relationships, especially at a young age is critical to life satisfaction in later years (as cited in Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, active play with peers should assist in the creation of emotional stability and ultimately positive developmental trajectories. Recess is also a time where children can freely demonstrate their non- curricular strengths. There are able to become both leaders and followers, where they practice perseverance, self-discipline, responsibility and self-acceptance (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

In contrast, play can also have a negative effect on emotional development if children have difficulty initiating or maintaining friendships. For example, aggressive peer contagion in children's early interactions with peers has led to an amplification of problem behaviours later in life such as drug use, delinquency, and violence (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Due to this, interventions at the elementary school level have been focused on the context of the environment as a factor in underlying peer contagion for aggression (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Dishion and Tipsord (2011) highlight that this is why reducing opportunities for unstructured or poorly supervised peer interactions and promoting pro-social norms among youth is important. The earlier that adults can intervene, the more likely children will be able to self-regulate their own emotions and use it as a protective factor later in life.

Physical Development. For children and youth, active play can assist in the promotion of physical development through movement and exercise. This is vital for

effective weight management, positive well-being and bone development (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). When physically active, the cardiovascular system becomes more efficient at transporting oxygen and nutrients to bodily tissues, thus improving their functioning (Unal, 2009). From a physiological perspective, Unal (2009) explains that when children play games that involve jumping, running, leaping and climbing they are helping to maintain normal functioning of their circulatory, respiratory, digestive and excretory system. However, it should be noted that different developmental outcomes would be produced dependent on the level of physical activity and gender. For example, in a comparison of American and United Kingdom schools, boys were often engaged in more physically vigorous and competitive play games whereas girls participate in more verbal activities (Pellegrini, Blatchford, Kato & Baines, 2004). Specifically, in the recess context, boys often appear in larger, more extensive playgroups with more satisfaction of the outdoors in comparison to girls (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). As a result, gender differences may influence the type of games and activities that children choose to play and therefore result in variations of physical activity and developmental outcomes.

Extensive literature has been written on the issue associated with sedentary movement for children and youth and the effects that this can have on development. In the last decade, schools have begun to shift away from daily physical education classes to placing more time on academic instruction in the classroom (Dills et al., 2011). This increased focus on academia may intensify the negative effects associated with sedentary behaviours. It is through physical activity that natural chemicals are released to support a greater number of connections between neurons and as a result

renew the brain with a supply of blood (Burris & Burris, 2011). Therefore, a cumulative importance is placed on increasing physically active movements during the school day for child development. As Pellegrini (2009) stated, increasing opportunities for loco-motor play, such as in the form of recess, can be related to immediate benefits in cardiovascular functioning, but we do not know the optimal form or duration of these breaks. Thus promoting physical activity can assist in maintenance of healthy bodies for children and youth, but the duration required for activity specifically during recess could be an area that requires future research.

The Role of Playing Games in Children's Development. Structured and unstructured games are utilized to encourage various types and levels of play for children and youth. Pellegrini, Blatchford, Kato and Baines (2004) defined games as “activities guided by explicit rules that are set in advance” (p. 109). In their study they determined three categories of games were commonly seen on the playground which include chase (running), ball and jumping/verbal games each with varying degrees of rules, physical activities and interactions (Pellegrini et al., 2004). They concluded that as children age the frequency of simple chase games decreased as complex ball games increase due to children's maturation and familiarity with rules (Pellegrini et al., 2004). There are also potential impacts of games on child development. Unal (2009) stated that, “playing a game, for a child, is the best education program for social, emotional, physical and cognitive development” (p. 95). He further argued that the recess context for play and games can promote a child's concentration development, may increase cooperation and solidarity, provide

opportunities for them to explore their environment as well as promote mental and physical development (Unal, 2009).

Pellegrini et al. (2004) has supported the recess environment stating that recess games are important because they require positive and supportive peer relationships to be successful. The social benefit of games in play could ultimately assist in fostering a positive attitude towards school. Reviewing the benefits of games during recess may also help to positively influence student development as well as be able to provide students with opportunities and the resources to play. A further discussion on the influence of recess supervisors on play for children and youth will now be discussed in more detail.

Recess Logistics: Supervision, Safety and Organization

Debate over Recess Supervision and Safety. The role that a recess supervisor fulfills may influence the culture and logistics of the recess environment. These yard duty supervisors are often adult figures comprising of teachers and parents who share playground supervision. Anderson-Butcher, Newsome and Nay (2003) discussed how recess supervision is often viewed as an unwelcome task where most students are encouraged to settle playground disputes on their own. Their research discussed how the absence of a caring supervisor on the playground may negatively influence vulnerable students' experiences during recess because they are more likely to seek assistance (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003). Thus the role of the recess supervisor needs to be to foster a safe and nurturing school environment for children and youth to negate issues of social exclusion and bullying (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003).

Influence of supervision on recess. Regarding supervision and safety, Frazen and Kamps (2008) found that active supervision is an essential characteristic in creating a safe environment for play as well as reducing the annual number of injuries that occur during recess. However, research has also shown that children are less active in areas that are directly supervised because of safety concerns (McKenzie, Crespo, Baquero & Elder, 2010). According to Thomson (2002) teachers need to recognize how their rules and regulations can dominate a playground environment. When supervisors take on a restricting role, this can ultimately mean they are suppressing physically active games and play structure use for management to reduce opportunities for harm. The Ontario Physical Health and Education Association (OPHEA) (2015) stated that risk management is an integral aspect of supervision that is dependent on the number of participants, skill level and type of equipment used. Evidently, the playground environment would drastically change if supervisors were required to approach recess as an allocated time for physical activity where the promotion games and activities were encouraged (McNamara et al., 2014; McKenzie et al., 2010). Ideally, “School staff should find a balance between safety and control on one hand while simultaneously providing a supportive, unobtrusive supervision that facilitates activity on the other” (as cited in McKenzie et al., 2010, p. 467). Due to risk management, this safety concern may also be another reason why rough and tumble play is discouraged in schools.

Rough and tumble play. Rough and tumble play includes actions of running, climbing, chasing and play fighting and most recently also includes fleeing, wrestling and falling (Pelligrini & Smith, 1998; Reed & Brown, 2000). What is important to

note here is that this type of play varies from acts of aggression (i.e. intent to harm and anger) because of “play face” where individuals are smiling and laughing (Reed & Brown, 2000). Tannock (2011) observed the elements of rough and tumble play in preschool children in order for individuals to be able to effectively understand, interpret and manage this type of play. Tannock’s (2011) discussed that if rough-and-tumble play components could be recognized and viewed within a developmental framework (especially for boys), educators may be able to more effectively plan for the inclusion of play. Although this play is not universally accepted for younger children, Piaget relates this to the pre-operational stage of development where children are able to practice skills at a young age (Piaget, 1951). But supervisors are required to assess and prevent all foreseeable risks for activities and because they are indirectly involved this could be why it is discouraged in schools (OPHEA, 2015). In conclusion, informing supervisors of how play has evolved and the influence that their approach to activity has on students should be acknowledged in the development of future policy and guideline recommendations for recess. An increased understanding of the forms of rough and tumble play and the degree to which it can be allowed is needed to enhance the recess play environment for children.

Recess supervision requirements. In addition, there is debate regarding the number of yard duty supervisors that should be present during recess. Anderson-Butcher et al. (2003) found that when the number of recess supervisors increased, there was a lower amount of problem behaviours that occurred. Yet Lewis, Colvin and Sugai consider that, “many teachers believe recess supervision is dreadful duty and they intervene only if necessary” (as cited in Anderson-Butcher, et al., 2003, p.

135). Thus although more supervisors could be beneficial for the children, it could add to teacher stress in having increased duty and responsibility throughout the school day. In addition, OPHEA (2015) stated that, “The level of supervision must commensurate with the inherent risk of the activity. The level of risk increases with the number of participants, skill levels and the type of equipment used” (OPHEA, 2015, p. 14). Therefore, if there is an increased risk than the level of supervision must increase with an appropriate method of supervision.

There is difficulty finding recommended or regulated Ontario supervision ratios for elementary schools during recess. The only mention of standards and ratios was through the Ontario’s Principal Council (OPC) (2007) for recess supervision. They stated that supervision is the responsibility of trained staff and that staff student ratios must fall between: 1:8-20 for kindergarten students, 1:50-100 for elementary and 1:100-150 for secondary (OPC, 2007). In addition, at no time should there be fewer than two supervisors during recess and they must have continuous and direct sightlines to the students that they are supervising (OPC, 2007). OPC (2007) also stated that the Ministry of Education has reduced supervision requirements for teachers from 100 to 80 minutes a week (approximately 15 minutes per day) but has not provided additional funding to cover the hiring of additional staff. A further investigation of these standards is warranted to support these ratios to determine whether or not they are appropriate and effective for schools in Ontario.

Student supervisors. As previously discussed, the yard duty supervisors are most often adult figures consisting of teachers and parents. This is the case even though the demand for recess supervision can be difficult during a busy school day

especially with additional funding cuts. As OPC (2007) stated, younger students are required to be separated from older students while playing due to the increasing possibility of injury. Again the issue of reducing opportunities for harm in relation to safety during recess is a common theme. Yet, the possibility of having student leadership positions during recess is being explored. For example, McNamara, Vaantaja, Dunseith and Franklin (2014) implemented a recess intervention program in Southern Ontario that recruited university and intermediate student leaders to lead active games for the primary students during recess. This was done with the intention to reflect on prevention and safe engagement strategies rather than a strict a supervisory role (McNamara et al., 2014). With this, they can offer a protective support for primary students rather separating them based on the possibility of injury (McNamara et al., 2014).

Furthermore, a school in Scotland implemented a program called *Playground Pals* which involved students who were trained to create a positive school yard experience by encouraging games, friendships and peer mediations (Gallacher, 2011). After interviewing these leaders, the researchers found the students felt their responsibilities included working as a team, teaching games, intervening when there is arguing as well as being a friend to those who do not have anyone to play with (Gallacher, 2011). These leadership positions not only help the students to feel important but also work as an effective preventative measure for problem behaviours. In addition to adult supervision, a further exploration of these ideas and to determine the extent to which peer supervisors are beneficial for both the children on the playground and for themselves may be important for future playground practice.

Maintenance and Organization of the Recess Environment. Contextual research of Canadian playgrounds is insufficient but is a prominent area of research in the United States. Burriss and Burriss (2011) described recess as “blocks of unstructured time, typically outdoors, when children freely choose activities and playmates” (p. 4). Research indicated that if the recess environment is tailored to provide opportunities for student engagement, children can safely participate in higher quality and supervised unstructured play (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). Yet, although the environment may be tailored, there are debates over the benefits and consequences of organized recess versus unorganized recess.

Tailored recess environments. Many children and youth spend time during recess socializing with their peers rather than participating in vigorous physical activity (Jarrett et al., 1998). To increase physical activity Anthamatten et al. (2011) implemented a *Learning Landscapes (LL)* program in Denver that culturally tailored 98-school yard play spaces. The LL program was implemented in poor minority neighbourhoods that lacked adequate environmental support for healthy physical development and community interventions (Anthamatten et al., 2011). The researchers believed that schoolyards could be reconstructed to encourage children to spend time outdoors with the implementation of schoolyard gateways, shade structures, banners, gardens and art and they found that these interventions had a positive correlation with physical activity (Anthamatten et al., 2011). In addition, to playground structures, voluntary physical activity was also found to increase when more school playground equipment was made available for children during recess (McKenzie, Crespo, Baquero & Elder, 2010; McNamara et al., 2014). Therefore,

equipment may act as a catalyst for physically active play. This finding regarding the increase in activity was also supported by Huberty et al. (2011) in a program called *Ready for Recess*, that implemented staff training, recreational equipment, and playground markings. Overall creating an optimal environment at recess should be conducive to children making physically active choices to assist in meeting their daily-recommendations for activity and this is an area that needs to be further researched in Ontario.

Organized recess. Reducing problem behaviours may also be a result of manipulations made to recess playground environments. Organized recess can be defined as “recess based on structured play, where games are taught and led by a trained adult such as teachers, school staff or volunteers” (Ramstetter, et al., 2010, p. 522). The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2007) stated that organized recess is effective because more children are encouraged to participate, can practice appropriate conflict resolution strategies, improve behaviour and after class attention as well as diversifying students’ needs and ensure that they are met (as cited in Ramstetter, et al., 2010, p. 525). An action research study completed by Schoen and Bullard (2002) supported the philosophy of meeting diverse student needs after they noticed that children who had autism did not experience social exchanges during recess. Thus, in implementing an organized recess intervention, all students (including those with exceptionalities) are encouraged to participate in games, therefore increasing their social interactions and skills. Yet the topic of organized recess is often challenged by supporters of unorganized recess.

Unorganized Recess. This is the belief that children need to have informal opportunities to voluntarily interact, explore and discover their environment in order to expand their knowledge and learn to take risks (Thomson, 2007). Pellegrini and Smith (1993) further expanded this by saying that children tend to be less active in restricted environments compared to one that encourages freedom of play. It is problematic to have children reflect adult roles thus they should choose their own level of physical activity and develop games without feeling pressure and constraints from adults (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Jarrett, 1998). When an adult leads a play activity, students lose the freedom of being creative as well as engage in physical activities of their own choice (Ramstetter et al., 2010). Thomson (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of school play yards and explored the benefits and challenges of naturalized playgrounds. He concluded that teachers need to recognize their influence as a role model and that they need to think positively about the environment in order for rules and regulations to not dominate the playground or have adults shield environmental interactions (Thomson, 2007). More research on contextual factors of the playground environment should be further explored dependent of if organized or unorganized recess environments are present, specifically in Ontario.

Current Educational Policy and Guidelines for Public Elementary Schools in Ontario

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), which is Part 1 of the *Constitution Act of Canada* (1982), gives the provincial government the power to decide how public schools will be run. Under this constitution is the legislation of the *Education Act* (1990) also known as Bill 82, which governs public education and is

ruled by regulation. Along with these regulations, the Ministry of Education is able to issue policies, which sets guidelines for school boards as well as outlines procedures and practices. The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (EFTO) (2015) website describes: “Policies will provide guidance on issues over which the Federation does not have complete control. A policy statement reflects the fundamental beliefs that guide the actions of the Federation.” Furthermore, individual school boards can issue their own policies under the direction of the Ministry of Education as well. An important note is that through a search of these educational documents (EFTO, Ministry of Education and local level recess policy), there is no definition or details of what recess entails, just an explanation of its organization and relationship to teacher supervisory requirements.

Recess Organization. In regards to the organization of recess, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education Act “there shall be a morning recess and an afternoon recess, each of which shall be not less than ten minutes and not more than fifteen minutes in length, for pupils in the primary and junior divisions” (R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 298, s. 3 (8)). Thus a recess or interval break for students between classroom periods is mandated but further detail is limited. Recently, school boards in Ontario have begun to implement a Balanced School Day (BSD) schedule, which involves a morning and afternoon break consisting of a 20-minute nutrition and a 20-minute fitness break. Peebles & Kirkwood (2011) conducted a case study describing the experience of five Ontario elementary school teachers with the BSD schedule. They found that overall, teachers perceived the BSD schedule to be more effective than the traditional schedule for student learning, and that the BSD influenced their

own instructional practices which ultimately positively impacted student learning (Peebles & Kirkwood, 2011). The OPC (2007) also funded a research project in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board regarding the BSD schedule and found that principals were the most satisfied with the BSD schedule while students were the least satisfied and teachers felt they had more minutes of recess supervision per week compared to the traditional schedule (Woehrle, Fox & Hoskin, 2008). Although this was the finding, they found that the BSD schedule worked favourably towards instructional and transition time as well as school cleanliness (Woehrle, Fox & Hoskin, 2008). Conclusively, inconsistencies in Ontario's recess schedules do exist, but the future of the structure of recess in Ontario schools seems to lie in the BSD schedule. More research needs to be conducted on the direct effects of BSD, as firm conclusions of the advantages and disadvantages cannot be made.

Withholding Recess. Recess can also be utilized as a preventative measure for reducing problem behaviours.

The Ontario Coalition for Inclusion Education (2006) describes recess as:

It is considered important for all young children to have a break for physical activity and fresh air at recess. If students are punished by being denied recess, they may be at risk of behavioural difficulties later on in the school day. It may be that problems could be prevented by providing adult supervision at recess, or by organizing co-operative play activities on the playground. (p. 13).

Inclusive education therefore gives the most descriptive explanation of recess in Ontario guidelines. To support these recommendations, in the United States, detailed research has been conducted regarding the issues associated from withholding recess

from students. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education as well as the Center for Disease and Control prevention discourages withholding physical activity opportunities as punishments for poor student behaviour (as cited in Turner, Chriqui & Chaloupka, 2013, p. 534). In a study conducted by Turner, Chriqui & Chaloupka (2013) cross sectional data was collected at the school, district and state level and they found that withholding recess was not allowed in 28.3% schools for poor behaviour, 26.7% for completion of school work and 89% for managing poor behaviour (p. 536). In addition, they found that approximately 67.4% of districts had no policy but having a strong district policy was associated school practices and an with an increased odd of recess prohibiting withholding recess for poor behaviour or the completion of schoolwork (Turner, Chriqui & Chaloupka, 2013). A weak policy was not associated with school level practices, and its implementation was linked to combating high obesity rates in these states (Turner, Chriqui & Chaloupka, 2013). Furthermore, Ramstetter et al. (2010) found that teachers should not withhold recess from children as a punishment because it is their own personal time. These findings should be taken into consideration when developing school district policies to prohibit withholding physical activity during the school day because of its high occurrences.

Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines. The Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) (2015) is a non-profit organization that has developed Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines. This is a reference document for physical educators within Ontario elementary schools to ensure the care and safety of students. Being able to minimize risks during physical activity regardless of physical, mental and cultural abilities is a primary focus of these

guidelines as well as implementing safe instructional practices and age appropriate activities (OPHEA, 2015). These guidelines were developed for the coverage of intramurals which can be defined as “school-sponsored physical/recreation activities which are: outside the student’s instructional time; not a selected school team/group; not a competition against another outside team/group” encouraging participation not competition (OPHEA, 2015. p.1). Yet again, it is interesting to note that the guidelines do not specifically mention its coverage of fitness break or recess, so it leaves a gap in our understanding with respect to educational policies and guidelines.

Teacher Supervisory Requirements. Through a further investigation of recess policies and guidelines, teacher’s schedules and time requirements for supervision throughout a school day was found to be a common theme. For example, in the Elementary Teachers Federation of Toronto (2012) Collective Agreement was the only document that specifically mentions recess and it was regarding its use as teacher preparation time during the school day. For example, “every classroom teacher shall be entitled to 60 minutes of preparation time per 10-day cycle free from classroom instruction and supervisory duties (exclusive of student recesses and a scheduled daily lunch period)”. These Ontario teacher conditions were dependent upon the exclusion of recess because it is not considered a time for planned instructional requirements during a school day.

In addition, the OPHEA (2015) defined supervision as “the vigilant overseeing of an activity for regulation or direction” including the three categories: constant visual, on-site or in the area (p. 12). Within intramurals and physical education classes, a supervisor is a teacher, principal or vice-principal employed by

the school board; anyone else is considered a volunteer and must not be the sole supervisor of an activity (OPHEA, 2015). These guidelines for supervision again to do not specially cover recess but highlight the important point that “all facilities, equipment and activities have inherent risks, and the more effectively they are supervised, the safer they become” (OPHEA, 2015, p. 12). As discussed before, safety and supervision is an area of concern for recess and there is potential for the future of recess policy and guidelines to include similar effective supervision requirements for play.

Local Level Recess Policy. Finally, from a local perspective, public school boards in southern Ontario reference recess during the mention of inclement weather conditions and teacher supervisory duties. For example, due to large geographical areas, weather conditions may vary from one municipality to the next, thus the decision whether or not to hold recess outdoors is made by the individual school principal” (DSBN, 2015; HWDSB, 2015; TDSB, 2015). In addition, according to EFTO collective agreement (2012) preparation time “shall be scheduled exclusive of morning and afternoon recesses, lunch period, nutrition/fitness breaks, and during the instructional day” and for supervision “includes assigned duties such as yard duty, hall duty, bus duty, lunchroom duty and other assigned duties undertaken before the beginning of opening exercises in the morning or the start of instruction, whichever comes first, before the commencement of classes following the lunch interval, during recesses or after the instructional day.” Further details at the local levels recess expectations are not included.

Although teacher supervisory and recess time frame expectations are briefly mentioned in social board policies, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding recess expectations and standards.

Principals Role and Policy Implications for Recess

The Principal's Role in Education. The principal is a key factor in achieving a healthy school climate regarding the effectiveness of a school based on informal and formal organization. The relationship that principals establish with their staff reflects their leadership style and how effectively they will be able to approach change.

Gulsen and Gulenay (2014) discussed the importance of two types of climates in schools including an *open organizational climate*, which includes cooperation and respect between teachers and principals as well as a *healthy organizational climate* where although the leadership of the principal is of key importance they are able to cope with their environment and utilize resources effectively with their staff. Bagibel, Samancioglu, Ozmantar and Hall (2014) completed a study with 638 teachers and found that 48% perceived school principals as responders, 46% as managers, and 6% as initiators. Initiators were found to be the most effective but the least present, and responders (who think change is not needed if everything is working well) were the most present and viewed the most negatively by teachers. Yet, further research to support the effects of leadership on principals' leadership styles and the way that recess is conceptualized and operationalized. Overall, a school principal may play an important and supportive role regarding achieving change in education. Therefore, making decisions about how recess is run at the school may vary dependent on the principal's attitudes and leadership approaches.

In the United States, Hope and Pigford (2001) stated that the “enactment of a bill does not guarantee its implementation... Once passed legislation is at the mercy of those at the local level: school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers” (p. 44). This could be applied to Canadian policy development, as there may be an existing gap between policy makers and implementers even though it is crucial that they work together to bring about change. In addition, since a principal may decide the degree to which policy will be implemented it is important that they work with teachers and embrace policies that match their pedagogical traditions versus those that compete or conflict with them (Hope & Pigford, 2001). Hope and Pigford (2001) discuss that a principal must be sensitive to change as a 3-stage process: 1. Initiation stage: develop strategies, develop relationships and plan for implementation 2. Implementation stage: support and assess 3. Institutionalization stage: policy has been adopted but need for continued support. It is understood that immediate change and the successful implementation of a policy can be a lengthy process and may be difficult to achieve. In addition, teacher’s negative attitudes towards change can become a major obstacle in making the process effective, therefore principals must present a clear vision for the school and its goals, have high expectations from staff, students and stakeholders and have them actively participate in this change process (Bagibel, Samancioglu, Ozmantar & Hall, 2014). This support from the principals should also be taken into consideration for future policy development in Canada in regards to the recess environment.

Often novice principals are faced with problems concerning school facilities, school stakeholders, educational policies, administrative issues and financial issues

(Karakose, Yirci & Kocabas, 2014). These challenges are greatly affected by frequent and sudden changes in educational legislation and this is why the development and implementation of policies must be carefully considered. To support this, Karakose, Yirci and Kocabas (2014) interviewed principals and found that through appropriate planning, investment and preparations new policies were more successfully implemented with better responses from the school. Therefore, it is important that schools have time to implement a policy before the next one is introduced to reduce overall frustrations and stress from principals and staff.

Examples of Educational Policy Implementation. In order to support children's quality outdoor play and learning experiences, there must be accordance between policy and practice; "the objective of establishing a written policy is to create a standard against which to hold the school community accountable for making changes that may take effort and commitment" (Schwartz et al., 2012, p. 263). The quality of written policies is often under-developed, fragmented and lacks sufficient plans for implementation and this is why monitoring of policies is necessary (Schwartz et al., 2012). In accordance, since the outdoors is a potential learning space for children and youth, there is a possibility of integrating curricular standards to maximize developmental outcomes in the form of written policy.

When district representations are questioned regarding policy and practice related to recess, it has often been based on administrator's perceptions about playgrounds and activities, not what playgrounds actually look like (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). In limiting research to school administrators, a social desirability bias becomes present (Lounsbery, McKenzie, Morrow, Monnat & Holt, 2013). Therefore,

there is a need to compare actual recess logistics to perceptions in order to inform policy in the most effective way. Burriss and Burriss (2011) discussed a unique approach to recess policy that describes outdoor learning possibilities and what constitutes as meaningful outdoor activity to provide guidelines for principals, teachers and parents. Having a non-negotiable and reflective outdoor play policy that includes establishing a playground for a variety of purposes (structured and unstructured) and diversifying the play scape will meet the needs of the decreasing national trend regarding children's outdoor time and school physical education classes (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

Furthermore, having a written policy for physical activity has been found to have a positive effect on participation in recess activity (Haug, Torsheim and Samdal, 2009; Lounsbery, McKenzie, Morrow, Monnat and Holt, 2013). Haug, Torsheim and Samdal (2009) found that schools with a written policy for physical activity during non-curricular school time (three times or more a week) had a higher proportion of students reporting daily participation in recess physical activity. Lounsbery et al. (2013) supports this finding and described that, "When policy and environmental factors that target improved physical education quality were in place, there were positive implications for recess time as well" (p. 140). In these cases, it is understood that physical education classes and recess may draw from the same time and resources, therefore creating policy specifications for each may have helped to increase its success. Overall, "Even the best written policies, however, are effective only if implemented" and this is why it is important to review literature and principals

influences to ensure that policy and practice can work together to create positive change and maximize student outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2012, p. 263).

In addition, standardization and accountability can factor into how recess is prioritized. For example, during the implementation of DPA (2015) principal and school board guidelines were created in order to assist in achieving successful change. DPA (2015) stated that principals have an essential leadership role in the planning, implementation, monitoring and reviewing of all program and they must be actively engaged and support initiatives with support and direction from the school board. Furthermore, it's a principals' responsibility to "ensure that all teachers are aware of all policies, procedures and guidelines related to safety that the school board and school might have including safety guidelines for daily physical activities and specific activities/sports" (DPA, 2015, p.20). Thus, if a principal is held accountable for change and staff are provided with the support and resources necessary from the school board recess could be made a priority.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

Because there are no established measures to capture principals' experiences of elementary school recess a questionnaire utilizing a *qualitative, descriptive exploratory* approach was used. Qualitative research seeks to understand a phenomenon in a context-specific setting, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Golafshani, 2003). In comparison to quantitative research where findings are arrived at by means of statistical procedures and prediction and generalization are key determinants, qualitative research allows a phenomenon of interest to unfold naturally through the process of illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). It is within this methodology that patterns and themes are established and the participants' voices, reflexivity of the researcher as well as complex descriptions and interpretations of the problem may extend literature or call for action (Creswell, 2007). For this study, this qualitative design was used to generate insight into the data by having descriptive responses from principals regarding their experiences of recess (Neuman & Robson, 2009). The use of *descriptive* research is to provide a "snapshot" of the thoughts and feelings of the participant's in order to give a fuller description of a phenomenon without direct changes made to the environment (Stangor, 2011). In this case, the phenomenon to be interpreted are the conditions and experiences pertaining to elementary school recess. In addition, the *exploratory* component involves investigating the distinct phenomenon because it is characterized by a lack of detailed primary research and may prelude to a larger scientific study (Berg & Lune, 2012).

The systematic gathering of recess experiences will give the researcher insight into how elementary recess operates and functions (Berg & Lune, 2012). This is important because principals' reports of recess is limited in current literature and they may provide a unique point of view into the logistics of the recess setting.

Qualitative measures have been designed to gather information regarding what principals believe would help improve the fitness break portion of recess as well as reveal patterns across schools with respect to their experiences with supervision ratios, activities and rules. The research includes a discussion of the ways in which these influences affect children's opportunity for meaningful play and interactions, ultimately affecting their overall health trajectories. Further, the results of this study provide critical information required for the development and implementation of policies regarding recess in schools – policies that do not yet exist at the provincial level in Ontario.

Theoretical framework

Social constructivism. As a theoretical framework for this research, “individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Social constructivism was developed by Vygotsky and is a branch of constructivist thought whereby knowledge is thought to be individually constructed via one's experience (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Within this framework, learning does not just take place with an individual, but it is a social and collaborative activity where people create meaning through their interactions with one another and objects in their environment (Gredler, 1997; Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Thus, learning is a social process and occurs when people are engaged in social activities (Gredler,

1997).

For the purpose of this study, principals' perspectives and experiences of recess will assist in developing a pattern of meaning within this context based on their responses to the questionnaire. It is within this view that subjective meaning is developed, leading the researcher to look for a complexity of views and rely on the participant's opinions of a situation as much as possible (Creswell, 2007). In addition, social constructivism may facilitate towards reaching an aim of a qualitative research which is to probe for deeper understanding rather than examine surface features of the data (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher also realizes the importance of recognizing how their own background in teaching may shape their interpretations of the recess environment. Thus they have positioned themselves to acknowledge these experiences when analyzing the data results. Further, the open-ended questions were created to encourage participants to construct their own meaning of recess which is based on the influence of their individual worldviews and social experiences, which is also a focus of a social constructivist framework.

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative research study, it is important to be explicit of my personal and theoretical perspectives because it can lead to potential bias regarding the research process and interpretations. I acknowledge that my educational experiences and placements throughout my BA and BEd have influenced my decision to research recess. I am passionate about student involvement, social connectedness and physically active play and have dedicated my educational journey to promoting this for children and youth. Overall, my objective for this thesis is "provide a voice for the

participants by raising their consciousness and improving their lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). With this research I wish to empower the school community, specifically principals, to recognize and reflect upon the recess environment and existing policy/guidelines and procedures in order to create optimal recess experiences for children and youth. Yet, I intend to view participant’s responses objectively, and ensure that I rely on their answers and reflect upon themes throughout the research process.

Participants

Southern Ontario elementary school principals from a local public school board are the sample for the study. To select the principals, regional demographic indicators were utilized to determine schools from economically challenged areas. Research indicates that children in low socio-economic status (SES) groups tend to be characterized by multiple risk factors that negatively affect school engagement and academic processes; thus inadequate educational experiences and increased dropout rates are present in these communities (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Sellstrom & Bremberg, 2006). Therefore, in order to mitigate these risk factors, the decision was made to include schools from these communities to find students that are experiencing and living under similar circumstances. This intentional and explicit sampling practice is often used in qualitative research, to best inform the researcher of the problems relevant to the research (Creswell, 2007; Mays & Pope, 1995). For this research, the top five cities in the region with an average low income cut off (LICO) of 7.5% or greater were chosen. According to Statistics Canada (2009) LICO is determined by analyzing family expenditure data, where families devote a large share

of income to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family would. Within these locations, twenty-four principals in high risk neighbourhoods (again with a LICO $<7.5\%$) were selected to participate. Gender and age were not accounted for and participants remained anonymous through the completion of the study. A minimum of twelve participants (50% response rate) had to respond to participate in the study and fill out the questionnaire and this was achieved. Otherwise the LICO score would have decreased to $<7\%$ to increase the number of schools that could participate.

School Characteristics. Regional characteristics of the schools were noted as participants were asked to name the city that their school resides in. In addition, all schools were part of the same local public school board and follow a “balanced day” schedule, where the school adopts a 40-minute break both in the morning and in the afternoon. This 40 minutes is divided into a 20 minute “Nutrition Break” where students eat lunch/snack and a 20 minute “fitness break” where students go outside for recess (weather permitting). The focus for this study was the 20-minute fitness break/recess portion of the school day.

Procedure

After seeking approval from the Brock University Ethics Board (Appendix A) and Ethics from the local school board, principals were contacted using a purposive sampling technique. Non-random sampling was used to locate a specific population under investigation, in this case it is schools located in neighborhoods with a LICO scores of $<7.5\%$ (Neuman & Robson, 2009). Using a list of 2015 principals that is posted on the local school board website, twenty-four principals that are eligible were

sent an email asking to participate in the study. If they responded with interest, principals were sent a letter of invitation and the link to the online questionnaire through *Survey Monkey*, an online program and database used for the questionnaire. They were informed that there were 33 questions at approximately 20-minutes. Participants had two weeks to complete the questionnaire after they were sent the link.

A copy of the correspondence that was distributed as well as the questionnaire and consent form can be found in Appendix B, C and D. The questionnaires will continue to remain confidential and anonymous for the principals. There are no perceived risks and an explanation of the participants right to withdraw was included in the informed consent. The online consent form was placed at the beginning of the questionnaire, which described that by clicking done at the end, participants are agreeing to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and if participants wish to decline an answer to any question, they could have left an answer blank and clicked “next” to move to the following question. In addition, participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss. Again as there was a final submit button to register answers located at the end of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

In order to address the first research question (RQ1), descriptive measures and two opened ended questions were utilized. This will provide information regarding principals’ beliefs and attitudes regarding recess. To answer this, principals were asked the open-ended question, “What is your general experience with the fitness

break portion of recess?” In addition, to gain a more specific insight into this question, several other questions were designed to elicit elaboration. The first, “What are the principals’ experience with recess activities and student engagement?” was designed to reveal patterns of equipment usage, accessibility and activity options. The second, “What are the principals’ experiences with supervision ratios during recess?” was designed to determine the average population of the school and supervisor/student ratios dependent on the student grade division. Finally, the third, “What are the principals’ experiences with rules and regulations that are put into place during recess?” was designed to encourage elaboration about recess challenges and student exclusion. In addition, the second research question (RQ2) “What do principals believe would help improve the fitness break portion of recess?” was designed to inform future recess practices and support systems.

For organizational purposes, to answer the research questions, the survey questions were matched based on content. In summary RQ1 will be answered by Survey Question (SQ) #5-7, 26, 28; RQ1a by SQ #15-17; RQ1b by SQ #8-11,13-14; RQ1c by SQ #18, 20, 22-23; finally, RQ2 by SQ #25 (see Appendix B for Principal Survey Questions). Overall there were two opened ended questions (Q5 and 6) and the remainder were descriptive questions used to determine the frequency of occurrences in principals’ responses.

Principals’ answers were compared in a *themed-based analysis*. As themes emerged recurrences were counted in order to determine prominence (Mays & Pope, 1995). Thus each principal’s answer was compared within each question in order to

determine the similarities/ differences and frequency, in order to address the research questions. Since the data was collected through a questionnaire on *Survey Monkey*, answers to the questions were copied over to an Excel file. To begin to analyze the qualitative data, open-ended questions (SQ 5 and 6) were filed and viewed separately. During the content analysis procedure, key themes emerged. These themes were coded while simultaneously noting the research question and theoretical framework as well as similarities, differences and frequency of occurrences (Newman & Robson, 2012). Further, as themes emerged, their recurrence was counted in order to determine its prominence, a technique suggested by Mays and Pope (1995) to support the use of qualitative research with quantitative techniques. Rigour was also strengthened by having another trained researcher analyze the data in the same way and come to the same conclusions (Mays & Pope, 1995). Thus a faculty member, a graduate student and an undergraduate student independently reviewed open-ended SQ 5 and 6 to determine major themes. The themes were then discussed and compared, concluding that the vast majority were consistently and independently determined. The themes that were not consistently identified were not addressed but were anecdotally recorded (i.e. engaging experience, loaded answers, recess privilege). The inconsistent themes were either a part of a broader theme that was already established or were only mentioned once by one reviewer and participant. While Cohen's Kappa was not specifically calculated, we were confident there was a very high degree of independent agreement.

In addition, tables were formed in order to visually represent the descriptive data. This method of quantification was used to condense the results to make them

easily intelligible (Mays & Pope, 1995). Responses were listed from greatest to least to easily visualize the responses in addition to including the number and percentage of occurrence. Overall, the questionnaire was constructed with the intent to determine principals' experiences of recess to help improve the recess environment. Overall, the end result was not to generalize this data to the entire population of Ontario schools, but just to explore recess in this particular context as a precursor to possible research needed in this area.

Chapter Four: Results

Overall the goal of the study was to gain insight from principals regarding their experiences and opinions of recess. A qualitative research design was utilized to capture twelve principals' experiences in low income neighbourhoods in local Ontario public schools. General recess experience, including recess activities and student engagement, supervision ratios, rules and restrictions as well as future directions were determined. Each will be highlighted independently, below.

General Recess Experience

To begin, all twelve principals (100%) agreed that “fitness break is an important part of the school day.” In order to gain more detail, participants were then asked, “What is your general experience with the fitness break portion of recess?” Out of nine responses, five principals (55.6%) mentioned that their experience with recess involved student *play*. This may include self-directed play, cooperative games as well as interactions with playground equipment or structures. For example, a principal stated that “students can use this time to engage in self-directed play with peers. It can vary from sports to other activities such as skipping or simply sitting under a tree talking with friends” (Principal 4). Similarly, others mentioned:

“Students play on play ground equipment with balls and some co-operative games they arrange” (Principal 2)

“Students head outside, some play soccer/football/basketball etc. others play on playground equipment, little ones play tag, etc. Others sit and visit.” (Principal 6).

In addition, three principals (33.4%) noted how play habits change with *age*.

“Some do not participate in activities especially as they get older” (Principal 7). But “younger children are active but mainly on playground equipment or in the yard. Older children either play pick-up soccer, softball or basketball or stand around talking” (Principal 8). Thus from principals’ experiences, younger students appear to be more active than older students and types of games and activities that students are involved in will vary with age. Overall, there were no participants that mentioned the outdoor natural environment as a component of their recess experience at their schools.

Furthermore, four principals (44.5%) reported that they witness *conflict* during recess between students. “On average, there are about 1 to 3 incidences of discipline each fitness break” (Principal 8). It was mentioned that “many students participate in physical activity but sometimes lack the social skills to do so appropriately” (Principal 6). Overall, two principals (22.3%) found that it is through *supervision* and re-direction that these conflicts are resolved. For example, “there are few conflicts and those are easily handled through restorative conversations by staff outside” (Principal 4). It was also noted that, “it is important that recess is long enough for students to get exercise but not too long that students get agitated and get into difficulties” (Principal 3). Thus the time frame of recess may influence the amount of conflicts that occur. Overall, “supervision is key and the greater the structure, the better success of it being peaceful” (Principal 9). Therefore, student conflict may be influenced by adult interactions, the structure of recess as well as a child’s level of development.

Recess definitions. In addition, participants were asked “How would you define the fitness break portion of recess?” Out of ten principals, four (40%) defined recess as a time for students to *play*. This could be *formal* as a “practice time for sports teams or clubs” (Principal 1) or *informal* where “children have free reign of our play space and play structure to engage in self-directed activities” (Principal 4). Additionally, recess was defined as “an opportunity for students to *socialize*” (Principal 2). Others stated:

“Time to run and play with friends” (Principal 3)

“Collaborative and a learning opportunity” (Principal 10)

Furthermore, definitions also included the outdoor recess *environment* and recess as an opportunity for physical activity, for example it is “chance to get outside and get exercise” (Principal 7).

Recess Decisions. Principals were also asked, “Who influences your decisions made about fitness break?” The eleven ($N=11$) participants could check all answers that applied for this question. Majority of principals answered that *teachers* ($n = 10$, 90.9%) had the most influence on their recess decisions. This was followed by their *own experiences* ($n = 9$, 81.8%) and *student influences* ($n = 9$, 81.8%). *Parents* ($n = 8$, 72.7%) and influences from *professional colleague’s comments* ($n = 6$, 54.6%) followed. Refer to Table 1 for principals reported influences on their decisions made about recess.

Table 1.

Principals' Reported Influences On Decisions Regarding Fitness Break.

Influences	N = 11
Teachers	10 (90.9%)
Own Experiences	9 (81.8%)
Students	9 (81.8%)
Parents	8 (72.7%)
Professional Colleagues	6 (54.6%)
Superintendents	3 (27.3%)
Articles	2 (18.2%)
Trends	1 (9.1%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses per rule. *Note.* Principals could check off all that apply.

Although given the option *superintendent comments*, *trends* and *articles* were not as a significant influence to recess decisions.

Activities and Student Engagement

Regarding activities and student engagement principals were asked, “What does fitness break at your school include?” Participants were allowed to check off all answers that apply for this question. All participants ($N = 12$) said that fitness break involved *unstructured outdoor playtime*. Nine principals (75%) reported that recess included *intramurals*. Between a structured and unstructured design, five principals (41.7%) stated that their schools provided *optional organized games* and nine (75%) gave *opportunities for supervised activities* such as running clubs, library time, craft and music clubs. Refer to Table 2 for principals reported fitness break activity options.

Table 2.

Principals' Reported Fitness Break Activities.

	Un-structured outdoor playtime	Opportunities for supervised activities	Intra-murals	Optional organized games	Required structured activity	Recess as physical education classes	No recess offered
<i>N</i> = 12	12 (100%)	9 (75%)	9 (75%)	5 (41.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses per recess activity option.

Overall, based on principals' responses, recess appears to be an unstructured outdoor activity with a majority of schools providing structured (intramural) or voluntary game and activity options with recess supervision. Required structured activities, recess as part of physical education classes as well as no recess options were not relevant.

Equipment. The survey asked principals to reflect on the equipment at their school for fitness break. Participants were able to select all answers that apply for this question. Nine (75%) principals stated that they have equipment that is in *good* shape. Yet only four of the nine schools (44.5%) listed that they had a *wide variety* of ample equipment that is available to all students all year including skipping ropes, balls hula hoops and nets. In comparison, seven of these schools (58.3%) had *limited* equipment options (mostly balls). Regarding this, "Most students bring the ball they want to play with. We provide items as demand and interest dictate" (Principal 1). Refer to Table 3 for principals reports on school equipment quality and state.

Table 3.

Principals Reported School Equipment Standing.

	Limited equipment in good shape	Wide variety in good shape	Minimal equipment, not in good shape	Equipment brought from home	No loose equipment allowed
<i>N</i> = 12	5 (41.7%)	4 (33.4%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents percentage of total responses.

Overall the majority of schools have equipment that is in good shape but with limited options for students during recess (unless students bring in their own equipment). *No loose equipment* as an option was not relevant.

Playground structure and accessibility. Principals were asked to characterize their playground and accessibility of recess options/structures for their schools. Principals could select *Yes/ No/ Somewhat* or *Not applicable* for each option for this question. The majority of principals answered that their school has a playground with a *slide* ($n = 11$, 91.7%) and *monkey bars* ($n = 9$, 75%) that are in good shape for students to use. Furthermore, all schools (100%) have access to *basketball nets* that are either in good or somewhat good shape and nine (75%) reported having *tarmac stencils* that are available for students to use. Finally, ten schools (83.4%) have a *soccer field* that is in good or somewhat good shape for their students. Refer to Table 4 for more detail regarding the quality and accessibility of playground options.

Overall, a *baseball diamond*, *natural materials*, *sitting areas* and *sand pits* are items during recess either needed work or where not applicable to their schools.

Table 4.

Principals' Reported Quality of Playground Options.

<i>N</i> = 12	Good Shape	Not in Good Shape	Somewhat in Good Shape	Not Applicable
Monkey bars	9 (75%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)
Basketball hoops	8 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0%)
3+ Tarmac stencils	8 (66.7%)	3 (25%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)
Soccer field	7 (58.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (25%)	2 (16.7%)
Baseball diamond	0 (0%)	4 (33.3%)	5 (41.7%)	3 (25%)
Natural materials	2 (16.7%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)
Sitting areas	2 (16.7%)	3 (25%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25%)
Volleyball net	0 (0%)	3 (25%)	2 (16.7%)	7 (58.3%)
Sand pit	1 (8.3%)	2 (16.7%)	5 (41.7%)	4 (33.3%)
Swings	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	9 (75%)
Rock formations	2 (16.7%)	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	7 (58.3%)
Slide	11 (91.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses for each playground option.

Student Population and Supervision Ratios

Principals were asked to report, “What is the average population of your school?” Half of the schools ($n = 6$, 50%) had a school population of +300 students. In addition, principals answered, “How many children are outside on the playground for fitness break at one time?” Further detail was required by asking principals if young students are separate from the older students. Five principals (41.7%) reported that younger students attend fitness break at different times than the older students and four (33.3%) stated that younger students are in separate areas than older students

during fitness break. Data results for this section are inconsistent when comparing the school population to the number and division of students outside thus no patterns emerged. Refer to Table 5 for a summary of reported fitness break logistics.

Table 5.

Principals' Reported Fitness Break Logistics regarding School Population and Student Division.

Fitness Break Logistics		<i>N</i> = 12
School Population	150-200	2 (16.7%)
	200-250	3 (25.0%)
	250-300	1 (8.3%)
	300+	6 (50.0%)
Number of Children Outside at Once	0-50	1 (8.3%)
	50-100	1 (8.3%)
	100-150	4 (33.3%)
	150-200	2 (16.7%)
	200-250	1 (8.3%)
	250-300	2 (16.7%)
	300+	1 (8.3%)
Young Separate from Older Children	Yes, different times	5 (41.7%)
	Yes, separate gated playgrounds	1 (8.3%)
	Yes, separate areas	4 (33.3%)
	Loosely, own areas (not enforced)	1 (8.3%)
	No	1 (8.3%)
JK and SK Separate from Older children^a	No, different times	3 (30.0%)
	No, separate gated playground	3 (30.0%)
	Loosely, own areas (not enforced)	0 (0.0%)
	Yes, separate areas	2 (20.0%)
	Yes, all together	2 (20.0%)

Count (Frequency). *Note.* ^a Two principals reported that they did not have kindergarten at their school.

Supervision to Student Ratios. Principals were asked to report, “Is the ratio of yard duty supervisors the same for all grades?” If principals answered *No*, they were asked to report the daily average ratio for each division (Kindergarten, Primary, Junior and Intermediate). Five (41.7%) of principals said that the student/supervisor ratio was the same for all grade whereas seven (58.3%) said it was not (Note. Only

six of the seven principals that said *No* reported the daily average ratio for each division). Refer to Table 6 and 7 for a summary of supervisor to student ratios.

Table 6.

Proportion of Schools that have same Supervised Student Ratio for all Grades (N = 12).

	Yes	No
Same Supervised Student Ratio	5 (41.7%)	7 (58.3%)
Count (Frequency).		

Table 7.

Principals' Reported Ratios of Fitness Break Supervision by Division.

Principal ^a (N = 7)	Kindergarten	Primary	Junior	Intermediate
1	1:15	1:50	1:100	1:100
2	1:20	1:90	1:70	1:70
3	1:12	1:30	1:30	1:30
4	1:26	1:100	1:70	1:50
5	1:15	1:100	1:75	1:70
6	1:37	1:60	1:50	1:50

Ratio reported as Supervisor: Student.

Note. ^a Only six of seven principals who said *No* reported their daily average ratios for each division.

When referring to Table 7, at the kindergarten division the range of supervisor: student ratio is 1:12 to 1:37. For primary, junior and intermediate the ratio ranges from 1:30 to 1:100. Thus there is no set standard of supervisor to student ratio reported by principals for this sample.

Rules and Regulations

Participants were asked “Do you have any of the following rules during

fitness break?” All participants ($N = 11$, 100%) answered that *no hard balls* are permitted. Five principals (41.7%) stated that there is to be *no gymnastics* at their schools and two (16.7%) reported that there is *no dodgeball*. Refer to Table 8 for a complete list of fitness break rules.

Table 8.

Principals' Reported Rules of Fitness Break.

Rules	$N = 11$
No hard balls	11 (100%)
No gymnastics	5 (45.5%)
No dodgeball	2 (18.2%)
No going inside	1 (9.1%)
No running	0 (0%)
No skipping ropes	0 (0%)
No tag	0 (0%)
Walk and talk	0 (0%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses per rule.

Rules may change dependent on weather or activity preferences. For example, there is “no running on pavement unless for training (track & field/cross country)” (Principal 1) and “rules change during tarmac only breaks- then it is ‘walking and talking’ only for safety reasons” (Principal 2). No running, no skipping ropes, no tag and no going inside were not a rule at the participants’ schools.

Recess Challenges. Principals were asked to identify the challenges their school has with fitness break. They were able to choose more than one response for this question. The most frequent challenge was selected by seven participants (58.3%) regarding *equipment management*. For example, “the largest concern is the lack of

available equipment for students due to cost restrictions” (Principal 2). In addition, concerns regarding student behaviour was considered a challenge for principals during recess as well. Five principals (41.7%) selected *social conflict among children* and four participants (33.4%) stated that *behavioural concerns* were of difficulty. Furthermore, *minimal supervision/ staffing* was selected by four principals (33.4%) and *lack of facilities* and *liability concerns with equipment* was a challenge for principals at three (25%) of the schools. Refer to Table 9 for a complete list of principals’ reported challenges during fitness break.

Table 9.

Portion of Principals’ Responses for Challenges with Fitness Break.

Challenge	N = 11
Equipment management	7 (63.6%)
Social conflict among children	5 (45.5%)
Minimal supervision/ staffing	4 (36.4%)
Behavioural concerns	4 (36.4%)
Lack of facilities	3 (27.3%)
Liability concerns with equipment	3 (27.3%)
Boredom, loitering	2 (18.2%)
Late arrival of teachers/ Not doing duty	2 (18.2%)
Minimal training/ Education of staff	1 (9.1%)
Less recess and more instruction	0 (0%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses per challenge.

Overall, equipment as well as student and teacher concerns are factors that principals believe can interfere with recess time. Minimal training/education for staff, boredom/loitering as well as the late arrival of teacher/not doing duty were not as relevant.

Fitness Break Teacher Supervision Decisions. Principals were asked, “Are teachers allowed to exclude students from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for academic or discipline reasons?” All of principals ($n = 11$, 100%) stated that *teachers have discretion* as to how they handle exclusions and it may also be a *group judgment*. For instance, “it can happen but only after a team decision and it is seen as a short term decision. A chronic problem would have breaks provided differently” (Principal 1). This is supported by another comment stating that, “exclusions must be cleared through the office before they can be executed in order to ensure all parties are aware of any mitigating circumstances” (Principal 3). In addition, *exclusion can be discouraged* but there is no specific rule put in place since it is up to the teacher’s discretion. Furthermore, one of the schools noted that exclusion may never occur “both fitness breaks” (Principal 2).

Fitness Break Hired-Yard Duty Supervisor Decisions. Principals were asked, “Are hired yard duty supervisors or parent volunteers allowed to exclude students from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for discipline reasons?” In total eight principals (73.7%) responded that yes, the *staff has discretion* as to how they handle exclusions whereas three (27.3%) of the principals said they were *not*. As a result, principals stated that “the office would take over for them” (Principal 1) and again that “exclusions must be cleared through the office before they can be

executed” (Principal 2). In addition, one school noted that “students may be asked to stand against the wall for a small portion of the fitness break” (Principal 3).

Suggestions for Recess Improvement

For the second research question principals were asked, “Please select the following that would help you improve fitness break at your school.” Principals were able to select more than one response for this question. The most frequent answer was *better equipment* chosen by nine participants (75%). Following this seven principals (58.3%) stated that there was a need for *more organized activities*. Principal 1 stated that, “Most of our students have not had the opportunity to play sports outside of school. Some do not know the official rules or how to conduct themselves when a game does not go the way they want.” Furthermore, half of the principals (50%) believe that *more supervisors* as well as *social skills training* is needed to improve recess. Five participants (41.7%) suggested peer leaders and organized play areas for unstructured to structured play. Table 10 summarizes principals’ reports on improvements that are needed for fitness break.

In contrast, playground training for staff/teachers as well as more options (i.e. indoor recess, for older children etc.) are not as relevant.

Table 10.

Principals' Reported Improvements Needed for Fitness Break.

Fitness Break Improvements	<i>N</i> = 11
Better equipment	9 (81.8%)
More organized activities	7 (63.6%)
More supervisors	6 (54.6%)
Social skills training for students	6 (54.6%)
Peer leaders	5 (45.5%)
Organized play areas for unstructured to structured play	5 (45.5%)
More options	4 (36.4%)
Indoor recess options	4 (36.4%)
More options specifically for older children	4 (36.4%)
Playground training for staff/teachers	3 (27.3%)

Count (Frequency). Frequency represents proportion of responses per improvement option.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine principals' perspectives of recess in low income neighbourhoods. Since literature on this topic is limited in comparison to student perspectives of recess, this *descriptive exploratory study* was conducted as a preliminary to this research in this field. Based on questionnaire responses, the following discussion will reflect upon principals' reported perspectives of recess activities and student engagement, supervision ratio, recess rules and restrictions as well as improvements in connection with current literature. The overarching theme of this discussion is that there are inconsistencies in principals' reported experiences of elementary school recess. This can be linked to an absence of recess guidelines, accountability and policies within the local public school board. Clarifications are needed for principals' duties, recess policy and guidelines in order to warrant consistency across school boards and ensure that that safety of all students is a priority. The following will also discuss implications of this research for educators as well as possible limitations of the study in addition to future directions for recess.

General Recess Experience

Recess is an important part of the school day and when principals in low-income neighbourhoods were asked to describe their general recess experience, student *play* was the most common theme. Principals reported that students may participate in self-directed play, cooperative games as well as interact with playground equipment or structures. In addition, play with peers can vary from high intensity games like soccer to low intensity play such as sitting and talking with friends. Play intensity, variations and the structure of games is described repeatedly

within existing literature on recess (Pellegrini et al., 2004).

In addition, three principals noted how play habits may change with *age*. Pellegrini (2009) stated that play has a functional meaning therefore there are beneficial outcomes at different periods of development. Principals in this study reported that the younger students appeared to be more active than the older students and the types of games and activities will vary throughout childhood. Thus a variety of play opportunities should be available for students that are age appropriate to maximize developmental benefits. This is consistent with research literature as age appropriate activities help to minimize risks associated with physical, mental and cultural abilities (OPHEA, 2015). In addition, principals reported that younger children are more physically active on playground equipment and yard, whereas older students are more likely to play pick-up soccer, softball or basketball. Pellegrini et al. (2004) found that simple chase games decrease as complex ball games increase with age due to children's maturation and familiarity with rules.

Furthermore, principals' reported that their general recess experience involved *conflict* between students. One principal stated that this could be due to lack of appropriate social skills required to positively interact with peers. Research suggests that when social skills training is provided to students, there's an increase in recess organization and reduced aggressive and problematic behaviours on the playground, suitably resulting in more positive play interactions (Anderson- Butcher et al., 2003; Cuccaro & Geitner). In addition, principals indicated conflict may also be resolved through *supervision* and the re-direction of students. OPHEA (2015) stated that, "Supervision is the vigilant overseeing of an activity for regulation or direction. All

facilities, equipment and activities have inherent risks, but the more effectively they are supervised, the safer they become” (p. 12). Principals reported that effective supervision is supported through restorative conversations, an appropriate length of recess time and recess structure. Research shows that a balance between safety and control, while simultaneously providing a supportive and unobtrusive supervision is the ideal structure for recess in elementary schools (McKenzie et al., 2010). In addition, longer daily recess periods allow children to engage in more physical activity as they are able to take advantage of becoming more engaged in play (Ridgers et al., 2016). Overall, student conflict may be influenced by adult interactions, the structure of recess, social skills training as well as a child’s status of development. A comparison of principals reports in low income neighbourhoods to those of a higher status would be needed to see if there are variations based on neighbourhood demographics.

Recess definitions. The highest reported definition by principals was that recess is a time for children to *play*. This aligns well with the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since all children have a right to play and engage in recreational activities that are age appropriate, it is important that they are provided with opportunities to enjoy this right (UNCRC, Article 31, 1989). Principals reported that play activities may range from formal clubs or teams, to informal activities such as self-directed play. Within this play framework, there are potential developmental benefits for children. Recess was also defined as a time for students to *socialize*. In relation to social development and play, children can rehearse and develop social strategies with peers as well as role model prosocial behaviours

(Burris & Burris, 2011). Furthermore, recess was described as an opportunity for children to be *physically active*. In relation to physical development, movement and exercise helps children maintain good health and a positive well-being (Burris & Burris, 2011). As described by Unal (2009), playing games that involve jumping, running, leaping and climbing help to maintain normal functioning of their bodily systems. Cognitive and emotional development were not recurring themes reported by principals for this study although they are often used to describe recess in the literature.

In addition, existing literature often defines recess as having varying degrees of supervision as well as play that is free from adult interventions (Holmes, Pellegrini & Schmidt, 2006; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). When defining recess, supervision was not mentioned by any of the principals in this study. Overall, the definition of recess by principals in low income schools in Ontario focuses on the opportunity for children to play and its potential social and physical developmental benefits, in comparison to its structure and adult interactions that are often mentioned in current literature.

Recess decisions. Principals were asked to report the sources of information that they use for making decisions about recess. Of the eight possible options, teachers' comments, own experiences and students were the most commonly reported influences for this Southern Ontario sample. In comparison to a study conducted by Simon and Childers (2006) in the United States, similar results were found. Principals self-reported that their own experiences, teacher's comments and then professional colleagues' comments influenced the majority of their recess decisions (Simon &

Childers, 2006). As a result, direct influences and experiences appear to have the greatest influence on principals' decision making processes. This finding indicates that the principal is a key factor in achieving a healthy school climate for staff and students (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014). In addition, both of these studies reported that trends and journal articles were among the lowest rated source of information for recess decisions. This could mean that research articles and the benefits/challenges associated with recess in trends, are not directly reaching or impacting the individuals who make these decisions (Simon & Childers, 2006).

Activities and Student Engagement

In current literature, researchers either support an unstructured or structured recess design. From an organized recess environment perspective, structured play opportunities that are led by an adult may be beneficial in reducing problem behaviours, increasing student play participation as well as successfully integrating students with exceptionalities (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Bullard, 2002). Yet, advocates of unorganized recess believe that children need to be free from restricted environments without adult pressures and constraints in order to be creative, expand knowledge, take risks and engage in activities of their own choice (Ramstetter et al., 2010; Thomson, 2007; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Jarret, 1998).

For this study, principals' reports of recess activities and student engagement involve both an unstructured and structured recess design. In addition to free play, principals stated that their schools try to provide intramurals, optional organized games and opportunities for supervised activities (i.e. clubs) during recess but the degree to which they are implemented may vary. As these are reports of principals in

low income neighbourhoods, funding may be a limitation in providing additional game opportunities as extra staff and equipment are needed. In a study conducted by Ridgers et al. (2016) when playground interventions (i.e. playground markings and physical structures) were applied to low income schools, there was an increase in recess involvement and physical activities levels. Thus increased play opportunities would be beneficial for children in this demographic. It is important to note here that principals' also indicated that recess is not meant to be a replacement for physical education class but may add to them. This aligns with current literature supporting the separation of expectations from physical education classes and recess in order to provide optimal play experiences for children and youth as they are separate endeavors (Haug, Torsheim & Samdal, 2009; Ramstetter, Murray & Garner, 2010).

Equipment. In response to recess activities and student engagement, equipment was found to be an essential component of promoting play in the recess environment. When principals were asked to report on the equipment used for recess at their schools, the majority stated that they had equipment that was in good shape but with limited options for students. Skipping roles, balls, hula hoops and nets were the most common options given to students. Research states that equipment may be used as a catalyst for play activities and games that can result in varying degrees of rules, physical activity and interactions that may positively impact a child's development (Pellegrini et al, 2004). According to OPHEA (2015) safety guidelines for intramurals, equipment must be checked before use (no sharp edges, cracks or splinters) and that size, mass and strength are appropriate. In addition, all balls must be inflated (OPHEA, 2015). It is important to note that there has been limited data

collected on the availability and status of playground equipment in schools and that the OPHEA guidelines do not directly apply to the recess environment. Further research in this area would be required to determine if limited equipment is consistent within higher income neighbourhoods as well. Also, there needs to be a further understanding of equipment management and promotion in order to effectively implement recess policies and guidelines and ensure they are put into practice (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

Playground structure and accessibility. In addition, in order to capture a visual image of the recess environment, principals were asked to report on the playground landscape. The majority of schools had a playground with a slide and monkey bars that were in good shape for student usage. In addition, basketball nets, tarmac stencils and soccer fields were available in either good or somewhat good shape. However, playground baseball diamonds, natural materials, sitting areas and sand pits were items during recess either needed work or where not applicable in their schools. Thus concluding basic playground options for students. Research conducted by Anthamatten et al. (2011) found that culturally tailored play yards can actually help to increase voluntary physical activity when made available to students during recess. When implemented in low income neighbourhoods, these play structures help to support healthy physical development as a community intervention in these areas (Anthamatten et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Ridgers (2016) in England, £20,000 was donated to the playgrounds of high social and economically deprived schools to implement soccer goal posts, basketball hoops, a sports area and a quiet sitting area in addition to balls, jump ropes and tennis balls. The study found that the

provision of playground markings and structures is a suitable stimulus for increasing physical activity across time (Ridgers et al., 2016). Further research on the playground status of low income schools is needed because these areas could benefit from the implementation of tailored recess environments.

Student Population and Supervision Ratios

Principals were asked to report on school population size and the organization of students at recess. No basic themes or patterns emerged thus the number of students and the number of children outside on the playground during designated recess time varies. In some of the schools, principals reported that the young students are kept separate from the older students either by attending recess at different times or having them in designated areas. This could be because active supervision is a characteristic in creating a safe environment for play as well as reducing the number of annual injuries that occur at recess and staff supervision is limited (Frazen & Kamps, 2008). In addition, OPC (2007) reported that younger students are required to be separate from older students while playing due to the increasing possibility of injury. Thus prioritizing the safety of students will affect the student organization of recess and in these particular schools in Ontario, the separation is evident.

Consequently, studies have been conducted regarding a safe and beneficial way for the interaction of younger and older students during recess. A recess intervention program by McNamara et al. (2014) was implemented in Ontario public schools whereby student leaders were trained to lead active games for primary students during recess. McNamara et al. (2014) found that student leaders can offer a protective support for primary students rather than separating them based on the possibility of

injury. Overall, other factors such as property size, number of staff and school demographics may also be a contributing factor but there is no set standard and further research is needed to explore these options.

Supervisor to student ratios. In this sample, there are inconsistencies in supervisor to student ratios reported by principals during recess. This inconsistency may be a result of a lack of policies or guidelines on the topic in the local public school board. Approximately half of the principals stated that the ratio was the same for all grades whereas the other half said it was not. When the range was calculated for the participant's answers, the kindergarten division had a supervisor to student ratio range of 1:12 to 1:37. In addition, for primary, junior and intermediate the ratio ranges from 1:30 to 1:100. Thus there is was no set standard of supervisor to student ratio reported by principals for this sample. According to OPC (2007) ratios must fall between 1:8 to 1:20 for kindergarten students and 1:50 to 1:100 for elementary. In addition, OPC (2007) states that there should be no fewer than two supervisors in continuous and direct sightlines to the students they are supervising. Subsequently these recommended numbers are inconsistent with the results of the sample, therefore further research with a larger sample size should be conducted to determine if the discrepancy remains. In addition, further research is needed to determine if it is the principal who decides what the ratio is based on a number of contributing factors such as the economic status of the school, funding, resources, school population, property size and playground layout. Overall, Frazen and Kamps (2008) stated that supervision is an essential characteristic in creating a safe environment for play, thus this should be taken into consideration when developing future ratio recommendations and

factors in policy and guidelines for schools during recess.

Rules and Regulations

Principals were asked if they had any rules or regulations for students during recess. All participants answered that *no hard balls* are permitted, nearly half said *no gymnastics* and a few said *no dodgeball*. Recess rules appear to be related to student safety. According to the safety guidelines for intramurals recommended by OPHEA (2015), “The primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with the school board and its employees. An important aspect in fulfilling this role is to recognize that there is an element of risk in all physical activity and to take action accordingly (p. 1). In addition, “all foreseeable risks must be identified and precautions taken to minimize risks” (OPHEA, 2015, p. 9). Again, this is applicable for intramurals in Ontario schools but a connection can be made that if physical activity occurs at recess, then school boards should follow the similar safety guidelines.

Furthermore, according to local level recess policy and the results of the study, rules may also be dependent on weather conditions. The principal has discretion on whether or not to hold recess outdoors (DSBN, 2015; HWDSB, 2015; TDSB, 2015). For example, a principal mentioned that during tarmac breaks, students are to walk and talk for safety reasons. Overall, since there is no complete consistency with principals reported recess rules, it is possible that all rules are school dependent (although this is not written in local level policy or guidelines). This is supported by an earlier finding from this study which noted that principals made recess decisions based on their own experiences, teacher and student comments. In addition, no

running, no skipping ropes, no tag and no going inside were not applicable rules at the participants' schools but it would be interesting to see if future research with a larger sample size produced similar results.

Recess challenges. This sample of principals in low income public elementary schools were asked to list their recess challenges. The most frequent challenge involved *equipment management* and a principal had stated that this was due cost restrictions. Due to the selected population being in low-income neighbourhoods, a comparison of equipment resources and funding available across school boards is required to determine if this is a collective problem. In addition, *liability concerns with equipment* are also considered a recess challenge. OPHEA (2015) stated that educators need to recognize that there is an element of risk in all physical activity and to guard against foreseeable risks by taking action accordingly. In addition, DPA (2015) supports this and states that the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees. Overall, throughout this principal study, the recurring theme of student safety poses as a concern for schools during recess.

In addition, concerns regarding *social conflict and behaviour* between children are considered a challenge for principals during recess. This could be related to the *minimal supervision/ staffing* that principals reported as well. Research shows that the lack of recess supervision can make recess a fearful time for children as there are increased opportunities for bullying and victimization behaviours to occur (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome & Nay, 2003; McNamara, 2014). A recess supervisor can be used as a preventative measure for students in helping to maintain a safe

environment for play (Frazen & Kamps, 2008).

Fitness-break teacher supervision decisions. All principals reported that teachers have discretion regarding student exclusion from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for academic or discipline reasons. Teachers may use recess as a time for students to complete school work or withhold as punishment for poor in class behaviour (Turner, Chirqui & Chaloupka, 2013). Although principals in this study reported that exclusion can be discouraged there are no records of specific rules or restrictions put in place to ensure the degree to which this is being fulfilled.

According to the Ontario Coalition for Inclusion Education (2006) recess can be utilized as a preventative measure for reducing problem behaviours and if students are being punished by being denied recess, they may be at risk for increased behavioural difficulties later on in the school day. In addition, Turner, Chirqui and Chaloupka (2013) state that it is important for all young children to have a break during the school day and withholding physical activity opportunities as a punishment for poor student behaviour should be discouraged. As a preventative measure for withholding recess, Turner, Chirqui and Chaloupka (2013) also stated that a strong district policy was associated with an increased odd of recess not being held for academic or behaviour related reasons. In their study they found that schools with the strong implementation of this policy were three times more likely to prohibit withholding recess and this was linked to tackling childhood obesity rates in those states (Turner et al., 2013). Thus this is another reason why the creation of recess and policy and guidelines should be encouraged.

Fitness-break hired-yard duty supervisor decisions. Principals were also asked if hired yard duty supervisors or parent volunteers are allowed to exclude students from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for discipline reasons. According to OPHEA (2015), a supervisor is defined as a teacher, principal or vice-principal employed by the school board. A volunteer (not necessarily a teacher) could assist in the supervision but cannot be the sole supervisor (OPHEA, 2015). Some examples of volunteers are educational assistants, retired teachers, parents, co-op students, teacher candidates and trained senior students (OPHEA, 2015). In this study, more than half of the principals responded that hired yard duty supervisors and parent volunteers *had exclusion discretion*, whereas three principals reported they had *no exclusion discretion*. In addition, a principal mentioned that the secretary office had to clear any exclusions before they could be executed at their school. A principal also reported that students may be asked to stand against the wall for a small portion of the fitness break. This supports the act of withholding recess for behavioural concerns that should be discouraged (Turner, Chirqui & Chaloupka, 2013). Overall, in comparison to teachers, yard- duty supervisors and volunteers are given less control in recess decisions regarding student exclusion. Therefore, this choice may be dependent on the school principal's standard over consistent policy or guideline recommendations across the school board.

Suggestions for Recess Improvement

Finally, in response to recess challenges, principals reported on potential areas for improvement to optimize the recess experience for children. The most frequent improvement that was recommended was *better equipment*. As discussed earlier,

research shows that equipment may be a catalyst for physical activity and play opportunities for children (Pellegrini et al, 2004). Since the sample was all low income schools, the need for equipment could be related to limited funding but further research is needed to confirm this assumption.

In addition, principals mentioned a need for *more organized activities* during recess. This might have been suggested as a possible solution to promoting appropriate behaviour during recess as organized activities may encourage participation, diversify students' interests as well as increase conflict resolution strategies (Ramstetter, et al., 2010). A principal in this sample had stated that, "Most of our students have not had the opportunity to play sports outside of school. Some do not know the official rules or how to conduct themselves when a game does not go the way they want." Since participation in organized sports require funds, this could actually be rated lower in these neighbourhoods because students are given less opportunities to play in organized sports outside of school. In Canada, this is why companies like Canadian Tire Jumpstart (2016) provide reduced funding opportunities for children to participate in community organized sports and clubs. Studies show that low income families actually promote more physical activity than those of middle class, but this play may be unstructured in nature (Cottrell et al., 2015). This research finding therefore supports the principals' report in this study that some low income children may be unaware of official rules and conduct for play. Furthermore, half of the principals (50%) believe that *more supervisors* as well as *social skills training* are needed to improve recess. The effectiveness of peer leaders and unstructured to structured play opportunities would increase if there were more

supervisors and social skills training available for recess, thus assisting in combating challenges associated with social conflict among children (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

Implications for Education

Overall, this study adds to the field of education by demonstrating that principals are directly involved in the logistics and implementation of recess in low income southern Ontario elementary schools. Recess is an important part of a child's school day and in order to understand the current status of recess, we need to determine the experiences of those individuals who are directly involved. The results of this study demonstrated that principals reported challenges associated with equipment management, social conflict and behavioural problems as well as appropriate staffing and supervision. In addition, principals listed rules and regulations for the recess environment and this is based on the construction of their own experiences, teachers and students' comments. Therefore, in order for change to be successfully implemented, professional educators should focus on their recommendations to achieve a safer and more successful school environment. For example, they recommended having social skills training available for students which literature states would assist in reducing the amount of problem behaviour during unstructured play activities during recess (Anderson- Butcher et al., 2003; Cuccaro & Geitner).

Supervision ratios. In addition, there are inconsistencies regarding supervision ratios during recess. Based on the results of the study, this knowledge could be used by school boards to implement safety guidelines for recess with consistent and appropriate ratios at the local school board level. In education,

OPHEA (2015) safety guidelines for intramurals state that the level of supervision must commensurate with the inherent risk of the activity, yet this does not directly apply to recess because these supervision ratios cannot be achieved. Further guidelines for controlling extraneous factors such as varying school populations, demographics, number of supervisors and staff, funding and number of students in each division should also be included to assist with this process. Additionally, a future assessment of the training provided and received by hired-yard duty supervisors in comparison to teachers is recommended in order to achieve best practices for supervisor to student ratios and maintain consistency across the board. Since the safety for staff and students is a main priority, more information about staggering recess times, the number of supervisors needed dependent on children's age and development and a supervisor's comfort levels with the number of students in a group is needed in order to inform future recess policies and guidelines. Based on the results of the study, smaller ratios could ensure a balance of structured and unstructured recess activities, provide more equipment management and therefore allow more opportunities for active and safe play for children. Balance and control, and a supportive and unobtrusive environment has been reported to be the ideal recess structure for educators (McKenzie et al., 2010).

Policy implementation. The implementation of policy and practice are important in order to support children's overall health and well-being in the school environment, thus its development is crucial as there are existing gaps in the literature. For example, a school wellness policy that includes recess for a child with the collaboration of alternative methods of discipline, safe play options for students,

the maintenance of recess equipment and trained supervisors according to principals can assist in promoting an optimal recess environment (Schwartz, M. B. et al., 2003). At the board and school level, a school health council with community stakeholders can assist in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of wellness policy goals (Schwartz, M. B. et al., 2003). In addition, a non-negotiable and reflective outdoor play policy could also be implemented. Burriss and Burriss (2011) suggested that guidelines for teachers, principals and parents should include examples of outdoor learning possibilities and meaningful outdoor activities, such as how to utilize the playground and play-scape for a variety of structured and unstructured activities and to match trends.

The results of the study and current literature also described how withholding recess from students was done for academic or disciplinary reasons. Children have the right to play and engage in physical activity and should be given opportunities to enjoy this right. Turner et al (2013) discussed how the existence of a strong district policy was an effective strategy in the United States for changing school practices and preventing the withholding of recess from students. With the existence of a policy, schools were three times more likely to prohibit withholding recess and with break in the school day were able to come back into the classroom better focused (Turner et al., 2013).

Principals' role. Principals inform decisions made about recess thus capturing their experiences and perspectives is valuable information that can be used to inform future recess practices. The principal's guidelines for DPA (2006) states that a principal has an essential role in the planning, implementation and monitoring

of all programs and are required to keep teachers aware of all policies, procedures and guidelines and provide them with the necessary support, equipment and resources. Therefore, a principals' leadership approach is important in the development of policy and the way that recess is operationalized and conceptualized. If principals prioritized recess and set standards and expectations within their school with the support of the school board there would be more consistency

Physical activity. Furthermore, the Canadian Physical Activity and Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (CSEP) (2012) recommend children and youth to accumulate 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity every day. For the sample of this study, fitness break is 20 minutes of an elementary school day, thus an optimal recess experience that includes options for moderate to vigorous physical activity would help children reach this recommendation. This can be supported with the inclusion of the Ontario governments Healthy Schools Plan (2005) DPA policy No. 138 which states that, "School boards must ensure that there are a minimum of twenty minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day during instructional time." Together these recommendations with the inclusion of recess time, would help to ensure that children are active during the school day. Principals' experiences and opinions of these recommendations is an area for future research.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study was conducted in an effort to learn more about principals' experiences regarding the logistics of recess. As a *descriptive exploratory study*, the sample size was limited to twelve principals and all participants belonged to the same

Southern Ontario Public elementary school board. Thus, in order to add to the study an increased sample size would give a better representation of the population to ensure a diversity of experiences. In addition, future research could also focus on a broader sample of school principals in various geographical locations as well as compare the difference between responses in low and high socio- economic schools. Overall, as a reminder the intent of the study was not to infer generalizability to other populations and demographic characteristics.

A second limitation was the methodological approach. Although this was a *descriptive exploratory study* of principals' experiences of recess in low income neighbourhoods in southern Ontario, the qualitative data reported was to be used as a preliminary for future research in this field. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher and was not previously validated, therefore it can be viewed as a pilot project for future principal studies. In addition, a principal stated that clarification for the word "playground" in the questionnaire was needed. During recess a playground was to represent a play structure, and not the play field.

Furthermore, to add to the current study a triangulation of multiple methods such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with a combination of qualitative and quantitative responses of the recess experience would strengthen the reliability and validity of the results (Patton, 2001). In addition, multiple perspectives of recess such as principals, students, teachers or administrators could be compared to allow for a more holistic perspective of the school environment. Additionally, in response to recess policies and guidelines, principals should also be asked to report on any specific rules or regulations that they follow or apply in order to fully understand their

experiences and thought process throughout.

Conclusion

Overall, this thesis provided insight into the recess experience of southern Ontario principals' in low income neighbourhoods. Specifically, across principals' reports, the results indicated patterns and inconsistencies in recess activities and student engagement, supervision ratios, recess rules and restrictions as well as recommended improvements. Since principals' experiences of recess is limited in existing literature, this thesis provides important information for professional educators regarding the issues surrounding recess and the need for the implementation and creation of future policy and guidelines. This is important in order to maximize a safe and positive recess environment for children. Future research should compare the recess experience of low income neighbourhoods to varying demographics.

Appendix A: Brock University Ethics Board Approval



Brock University
Research Ethics Office
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 5/25/2015

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: MCNAMARA, Lauren - Child and Youth Studies

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Ken Lodewyk

FILE: 14-225 - MCNAMARA

TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Erin Vaantaja
SUPERVISOR: Lauren McNamara

TITLE: Recess Context and Perspectives: A Canadian Principal's Approach

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 5/31/2016

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 5/25/2015 to 5/31/2016.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 5/31/2016. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:


Jan Frijters, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.

Appendix B: Principal Survey 2015

Child and Youth Studies Department, Brock University

Principal Investigator: Lauren McNamara (Professor, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies),
lmcnamara@brocku.ca

Principal Student Investigator: Erin Vaantaja (Masters Student, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies),
ev09wz@brocku.ca

Co-Investigator: Ken Lodewyk (Professor, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences), klodewyk@brocku.ca

This research is being conducted to develop a richer understanding about recess practices, challenges, and perceptions around the value of recess (play and social interaction) in Ontario public elementary schools. This survey is estimated to take **20** minutes to complete and all results will remain anonymous. Participation in this survey is voluntary and survey respondents are encouraged, but not required, to answer all of the questions. There will be no individual school identifiers. Information will be collated by city in order to obtain demographic information but city identifiers will not be used (only region identifiers will be used).

There are **34** questions.

*Consent to participate is finalized when you click **DONE** at the end of the survey.*

1. In what city does your school reside in?

2. Which system is your school part of?

Public Separate (i.e. Catholic) Private

3. Does your school follow the Balanced School Day?

Yes No If No, please describe how recess fits into your school day:

4. What would you mostly characterize your school's location as?

Urban Residential Rural

The following questions pertain to the fitness break portion of recess
(as opposed to nutrition break when students are eating).

5. What is your general experience with the fitness break portion of recess?

6. How would you define the fitness break portion of recess?

7. How many minutes are devoted to fitness break (not including nutrition break) at your school per day?

0-10 10-20 20-30 30-40 40-50

Comments:

8. What is the average population of your school?

0-50 50-100 100-150 150-200 200-250 250-300

300 or more

Comments:

9. How many children are outside on the same playground for fitness break at one time?

0-50 50-100 100-150 150-200 200-250 250-300

300 or more

Comments:

10. Are the younger grades separate from the older grades during fitness break?

- Yes, they are outside at different times
- Yes, they have their own separate gated playground
- Yes, they are allocated separate areas on the same playground
- Loosely, they have their own areas but it is not enforced
- No

Comments:

11. Are the Junior Kindergartens (JK) and Senior Kindergartens (SK) on the same playground as the older children?

- No, they are outside at different times
- No, they have their own separate gated playground
- Yes, they are all together
- Yes, but they are allocated separate areas on the same playground
- Yes but loosely, they have their own areas but it is not enforced

Comments:

12. In the comments section, please indicate the hiring requirements for yard duty supervisors (those that are not teachers).

13. Is the ratio of yard duty supervisors to students the same for all grades?

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | If Yes, what is the daily average ratio? |
|-----|----|--|

14. If No, what is the daily average ratio for:

Kindergarten	Primary	Junior	Intermediate
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Comments:

15. Fitness break at your school includes (check all that apply)

- Unstructured outdoor playtime
- Opportunities for supervised activities such as running clubs, library time, craft clubs, music clubs etc
- Intramurals
- Optional organized games
- Required structured activity
- Recess is a part of physical education classes
- No recess is offered

16. Equipment at your school, during fitness break, includes (select all that apply)

- A wide variety of ample equipment is available to students all year, it is in good shape, replaced regularly – skipping ropes, balls, hula hoops, nets, etc
- Limited equipment (mostly balls) in good shape
- Minimal equipment, but not in good shape

No loose equipment allowed

Equipment can be bought from home only

Comments

17. Which of the following characterize your playground and are accessible to children for use during outdoor fitness break?

	Response
Monkey bars in good shape?	Monkey bars in good shape? Response menu
Basketball hoops in good shape?	Basketball hoops in good shape? Response menu
More than three tarmac stencils in good shape?	More than three tarmac stencils in good shape? Response menu
Soccer field in good shape?	Soccer field in good shape? Response menu
Baseball diamond in good shape?	Baseball diamond in good shape? Response menu
Abundance of natural materials- trees, moguls, sand, logs in good shape?	Abundance of natural materials- trees, moguls, sand, logs in good shape? Response menu
Benches, tables, sitting area in good shape?	Benches, tables, sitting area in good shape? Response menu
Volleyball net area in good shape?	Volleyball net area in good shape? Response menu
Sand pit in good shape?	Sand pit in good shape? Response menu
Swings in good shape?	Swings in good shape? Response menu
Rocks to sit on or climb in good shape?	Rocks to sit on or climb in good shape? Response menu
Slide in good shape?	Slide in good shape? Response menu
Monkey bars in good shape?	Monkey bars in good shape? Response menu

Other (please specify)

18. Do you have any of the following rules during fitness break?

No running	No gymnastics	No skipping ropes	No going inside	No
dodgeball	No hard balls	No tag	Walk and talk	

Other (please specify):

19. Please indicate how your school handles fitness break during inclement weather.

20. Please select from the list below all of the challenges your school has with fitness break.

We need less recess time and more time for instruction	Lack of facilities
Minimal supervision/ staffing	Minimal training/ education of staff
Behavioral concerns	Liability concerns with equipment
Equipment management	Social conflict among children
Boredom, loitering	Late arrival of teachers/ not doing duty

Comments:

21. Please number the top 5 challenges your school has with fitness break, #1 being the most challenging:

Need for instructional time	Lack of facilities
Minimal supervision/ staffing	Behavioural concerns
Liability concerns with equipment	Theft of equipment
Equipment management	Social conflict among children
Boredom, loitering	Late arrival of teachers/ not doing duty

22. Are teachers allowed to exclude students from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for academic or discipline reasons?

Yes	No	Exclusion is discouraged
Teachers have discretion as to how they handle exclusions		

Comments:

23. Are hired yard duty supervisors or parent volunteers allowed to exclude students from all or part of fitness break as a consequence for discipline reasons?

Yes	No	Exclusion is discouraged
Staff has discretion as to how they handle exclusions		Does not apply

Comments:

24. In the school, where do the majority of discipline-related problems occur?

During class time	Outside recess	Indoor recess
Nutrition/ lunch room	Halls, bathrooms	Other (please specify)

Comments:

25. Please select the following that would help you improve fitness break at your school.

More supervisors	More organized activities	Better equipment
Playground training for staff/teachers	More options	Indoor recess options
Social skills training for students	Peer leaders	
Organized play areas for unstructured to structured play	More options specifically for older children	

Comments:

26. Please select the box the best represents the following statements: "Fitness break is an important part of the school day."

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Comments:

27. At your school, has there been a reduction of fitness breaks in the last five years?

Yes	No	If Yes, why do you think this is?
-----	----	-----------------------------------

28. Who influences your decisions made about fitness break? Check all that apply.

Own experiences	Teacher	Professional colleagues
Parents	Students	Superintendents
Trends	Articles	Other

Comments:

The following questions will pertain only to Nutrition Break.

29. During nutrition break, do students eat in their classrooms?

Yes	No	If Yes, is there an adult supervisor in each classroom?
-----	----	---

30. If the answer is No, please describe the supervision situation for nutrition break.

31. Please indicate where grade JK/SK students are expected to eat their lunch/snacks.

Classroom Gymnasium Cafeteria Hallway
Outside

Comments:

32. Please indicate where grade 1-3 students are expected to eat their lunch/ snacks.

Classroom Gymnasium Cafeteria Hallway
Outside

Comments:

33. Please indicate where grade 4-8 students are expected to eat their lunch/snacks.

Classroom Gymnasium Cafeteria Hallway
Outside

Comments:

Survey is complete!

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Lauren McNamara at lmcnamara@brocku.ca. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca. The file number is 14-225- MCNAMARA.

By clicking DONE you are finalizing your consent to participate in the study._

Thank you for your assistance in this project!

Appendix C: Principal Consent Form



Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Child and Youth Studies

Consent Form

Project Title: Recess: Ontario Principals' Perspectives

Principal Investigator: Lauren McNamara (Professor, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies), lmcnamara@brocku.ca

Principal Student Investigator: Erin Vaantaja (Masters Student, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies), ev09wz@brocku.ca

Co-Investigator: Ken Lodewyk (Professor, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences), klodewyk@brocku.ca
Child and Youth Studies Department, Brock University

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study at Brock University. The purpose of this study is to move beyond the need for recess and capture the context and the cumulative impact on children. The research will include a discussion of the ways in which these influences affect children's opportunity for meaningful play shape and interactions, ultimately affecting their overall health trajectories. Further, we hope that the results of this study will provide critical information required for the development and implementation of policies regarding recess in schools – policies that do not yet exist at the provincial level in Ontario.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will fill out a questionnaire regarding the context of your schools recess/fitness break. Questions are related to school routines, beliefs, attitudes, activity levels, safety, supervision ratios, funding, definition/purpose, benefits, challenges, training, and equipment. Participation will take approximately 20 minutes of your time and will be administered online through a link to Survey Monkey.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Benefits of participation include capturing the school fitness break/recess context in order to provide information for policy development and practice in elementary schools. This is important in determining if optimal opportunities and experiences are provided for children through self-reflection of principals. At the end of the study, results will be published and disseminated to Ontario school board policy makers via email. We hope they will use the information for the creation of future policy development and practice surrounding recess. Data will be used for research purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential and anonymous. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information you provide is considered confidential and anonymous. Because our interest is in the average responses of the entire group of participants, neither you nor your responses will be identified individually in any way in written reports of this research. Group data only may be published, presented at conferences, and used to evaluate programs. All records are kept confidential and no personal or school identifiers of any kind are used on the data. Only regional identifiers will be used in the reporting of the results. Data collected during this study will be stored online, in a password-protected file and only accessed in a secure location for the research in the property of Dr. Lauren McNamara, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University. Data will be retained for 10 years.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary and by clicking DONE at the end of the questionnaire, participants are agreeing to consent to participate in the study. If participants wish to decline an answer to any question they may do so by not answering and clicking "next" to read the next question. In addition, if they wish to withdraw from the study this can be done at any time throughout the questionnaire without any penalty or loss. There is a final submit button to register answers located at the end of the questionnaire, therefore closing the browser will keep any data from being submitted. No partial data will be used in the analysis. After data has been submitted it becomes part of an anonymous aggregate therefore you cannot withdraw your answers once it has been submitted because no personal identifiers are being used.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available via the principal investigators (Dr. Lauren McNamara) website at www.recessprojectcanada.com by approximately June 2017. Data may be used for secondary purposes, which would entail comparison of data in future studies on the same/similar topic under the advisory of Dr. Lauren McNamara.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Lauren McNamara, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca. The file number is 14-225- MCNAMARA. Thank you for your assistance in this project. You are encouraged to keep a copy of this form by printing or saving it for your records.

Appendix D: Letter of Invitation



Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Child and Youth Studies

Letter of Invitation

Project Title: Recess: Ontario Principals' Perspectives

Principal Investigator: Lauren McNamara (Professor, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies), lmcnamara@brocku.ca

Principal Student Investigator: Erin Vaantaja (Masters Student, Faculty of Child and Youth Studies), ev09wz@brocku.ca

Co-Investigator: Ken Lodewyk (Professor, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences), klodewyk@brocku.ca
Child and Youth Studies Department, Brock University

Via email

Dear (Principal):

We would like to invite you to participate in an anonymous, province-wide study of principal's perspectives on recess in Ontario's elementary schools. The purpose of this study is to gather an array of information to help us learn about the assumptions, logistics, challenges, and needs with respect to recess. This information has yet to be captured from schools in Ontario – leaving a gap of critical information required for the development and implementation of policies regarding recess in schools.

We have designed an online survey using Survey Monkey that will take approximately 20 minutes to participate and can be accessed from your school's computer. Questions are related to school routines, beliefs, attitudes, activity levels, safety, supervision ratios, funding, definition/purpose, benefits, challenges, training, and equipment.

This information is important in determining if optimal opportunities and experiences are provided for children. Data will be used for research purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential and anonymous. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in the study.

All information you provide is considered confidential and anonymous. Because our interest is in the average responses of the entire group of participants, neither you nor your responses will be identified individually in any way in written reports of this research. Group data only may be published, presented at conferences, and used to evaluate programs. All records are kept confidential and no personal or school identifiers of any kind are used on the data. Only regional identifiers will be used in the reporting of the results. Data collected during this study will be stored online, in a password-protected file and only accessed in a secure location for the research in the property of Dr. Lauren McNamara, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University. Data will be kept for 10 years.

Participation in this study is voluntary and by clicking the DONE button at the end questionnaire, participants are agreeing to consent to participate in the study. If participants wish to decline an answer to any question they may do so by not answering and clicking "next" to read the next question. In addition, if they wish to withdraw from the study this can be done at any time without any penalty or loss, as there is a final submit button to register answers located at the end of the questionnaire. Participant can close the browser window if they would like to withdraw.

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available via the principal investigators (Dr. Lauren McNamara) website at www.recessprojectcanada.com by approximately June 2016. Data may be used for secondary purposes, which would entail comparison of data in future studies on the same/similar topic. If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Lauren McNamara, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca. The file number is 14-225- MCNAMARA. We hope that you will assist in allowing participation in the project and we encourage that you keep a copy of this invitation for your records. Thank you.

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